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HE PLACED HIS LEFT HAND UPON THE HEAD OF THE DEAD WOMAN AS HE SPOKE, AND DROPPING UPON ONE KNEE,
RAISED HIS RIGHT HAND TOWARD HEAVEN.

The Last of the Pirates;

OR,
DOOM DRIVEN.

A Romance of the End of Ocean Outlawry.*

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MONTEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIRATE'S HOME.

ONLY a short half-century ago a pirate flag floated over the ocean, an outlaw craft sped from sea to sea, her decks shadowed under the sable ensign with its hideous emblem, the "skull and cross-bones."

It is of the daring man who raised that pirate flag, his wild, strange life of romance, that I now write, building my story upon facts that came to me through looking over a mass of time-worn letters found in a deserted mansion, crumbling to ruin, that stands upon the lovely shores of the Chesapeake.

"There is a history to yonder old mansion," said my planter friend, whom I was visiting at his home in Maryland.

We were driving out one afternoon, and had driven into an estate to reach a hill that gave us a grand view of the Chesapeake and its shores.

He pointed as he spoke to an old brick mansion that stood in a little vale a few hundred yards from the shore.

The hills about it were clad with heavy timber, and it seemed to be almost hiding away from observation.

The sunset shadows were already upon the vale, and gloom rested upon the old house and all about it.

Deserted for years, it was crumbling to decay, its shutters hanging in the wind, its roof moss-grown and the yard and gravelway overgrown with weeds, rank grass and bushes.

"And what is its history?" I asked, interested in the old homestead, which in its day had been a grand one, no doubt.

"It was the home of a pirate," answered my friend.

"A pirate in these matter-of-fact days?" I asked.

"He was known as the Last of the Pirates, and the time of his piracies was back among the thirties, you must know."

"Tell me of him," I requested, with deeper interest.

"There is little that I can tell, other than that he inherited the estate, and went there to live, coming from no one knew where, for he was thought to be dead."

"He had had some love affair, I believe, a duel followed, he decamped and it was years after before he returned."

"I remember seeing him often, for I was a boy then, and he certainly lived in grand style, and yet purposely exiled himself, for he would receive no visitors."

"One night he disappeared, servants and all, and yonder house has never been occupied since. Soon after his disappearance it came out that he was a pirate chief, and no one has heard of him from that day. That is all I can tell you."

I thanked my friend and mentally determined to visit the Pirate's Home.

Several days after I rode over-on horseback, and went upon a tour of discovery from cellar to garret, of the desolate abode, for I had a lantern with me.

Desertion, dust, decay were upon all, for the house had been left furnished, when its pirate master had so hastily departed.

In one room, the owner's, was an oaken desk, and going through it I came upon the time-stained papers I have mentioned.

Instantly I became deeply interested, for among those old letters and documents was a vessel's log, and I learned strange secrets therefrom.

Those secrets I now make known in the pages of my romance of "Captain Corti," only suppressing real names and the situation of exact scenes, for many still live who met and knew well the man who was called "The Last of the Pirates."

CHAPTER II.

THE WAIF.

THE gray dawn broke over the sea and revealed a small boat drifting about at the mercy of the waves.

No land was to be seen, no sail was in sight; only that frail boat, driven by the wind, beaten by the waves, yet still floating on its way.

In it were three persons. One of these lay in the stern, so motionless, so wan, that it could be seen that death had set its seal upon her lips forever.

* Founded upon the career of Cor'i, the Corsair, a famous slaver-pirate, whose piracy extended to a late a date as 1836.

It was a beautiful face, for all that the eyes were sunken and a look of anguish rested upon it, even after death.

It was the face of a woman of twenty-eight, perhaps, and the form, though emaciated, was still shapely in every outline.

She was clad in a dress of costly texture, which had been gracefully arranged about her form by some loving hand, and upon her heart, peacefully folded, lay her beautiful hands.

In the bow of the boat were two others, one a negress, and the other a boy of five who lay in her arms asleep.

The face of the negress was haggard in the extreme, and her hand trembled as she passed it lovingly over the chestnut curls of the little sleeper.

"Oh, Lord ha' marcy 'pon us!" broke from the lips of the negress, and she gazed over the waters as the day dawned. "No lan' in sight, not a vessel near us! Poor chile! I knows he has got ter die, for there is the last drop o' water, here is the last biscuit. I am almost gone myself, but I promised poor dead missy I'd save her chile, and I'll not touch that water and biscuit if I die for it."

Soon the little boy awoke and looking up into the face of the negress he smiled, while he asked in a low tone:

"Is mamma 'wake yet, Mam' Silla?"

"No, chile," she still sleepin'."

"How long she sleeps! Can I kiss my mamma, Mam' Silla?"

"Yes, chile, but don't say nothin' to her."

The boy crept softly aft, while the old negress rocked her body to and fro and wrung her hands in bitter anguish of soul.

"Po' chile! He little dream she can't be waked up, ontill Gabriel sound his trump."

The boy crept to his mother's side and, bending over her, imprinted a kiss upon her forehead.

Then he came forward and said in his childish way:

"I didn't wake mamma, did I, Mam' Silla?"

"No, chile."

"Oh! I'm so hungry."

"Here, chile, eat this nice biscuit, and drink this water."

As she spoke the noble woman gave to the child the last drop of water, the last morsel of food, while she was starving to death herself.

She turned her head away as he ate it, and then, as she saw the last crumb gone, the last drop swallowed, from her lips broke a cry of anguish which she could not suppress, and she fell forward on her face and burst into tears.

The boy tried to comfort her, and at last her moaning ceased and, holding him in her arms, she said faintly:

"Let us go to sleep, chile."

The boy obeyed and soon sunk to sleep, while she lay back against the boat's side and closed her eyes.

Had they been open they would have seen the rising sun glance upon a white sail.

Above the horizon, rising higher and higher appeared a vessel, and her course lay straight toward the drifting boat!

It was a schooner, rakish in build, carrying a vast spread of canvas, and her decks were armed.

There were scars upon the hull and spars, and the sails were patched, as though the vessel had been in more than one hot action.

Upon her deck were some three-score men, wearing white pants, blue shirts and red skull-caps, and a hard-looking set of humanity they were.

Aft a man paced to and fro the quarter-deck, with the air of one who was monarch of all he surveyed.

His face was darkly bronzed, stern and strongly marked.

His beard and hair were iron-gray, and his eyes black and piercing.

He wore a black uniform trimmed with silver lace; at his side hung a heavy cutlass, and in his sash were a pair of gold-mounted pistols.

"Ho, aloft there!" he suddenly called out to the man in the maintop.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Are you blind, sir, that you don't see yonder object upon the waters, dead ahead?"

"Boat ho!" rang out the man at this rebuke, for the captain had discovered the boat ere the lookout had sighted it.

"Well, sir, what do you make it out?"

"A drifting boat, sir, and it has occupants."

"All right. Keep your eyes open in future. Helmsman, bring her up half a point to run alongside of yonder boat."

The helmsman obeyed, and half an hour after the boat was alongside of the schooner.

"Are they dead?" asked the captain, as he glanced over into the boat in an indifferent way.

"The lady is, sir, and also the negress."

"The negress seems to be still warm, but the little boy is asleep."

The captain now caught a good view of the dead, upturned faces of the two women, and a groan escaped him, while from his lips came the slow-spoken words:

"It is she!"

"Hold those bodies upon deck, and do it tenderly. Give me the boy."

The men in the boat obeyed, and the boy smiled as he was handed up to the captain, while he said:

"Now we will have something to eat, won't we? But mamma, and Mam' Silla, too, are fast asleep."

The man made no reply, but carried the child into the cabin and ordered food gotten for him at once.

Then, to the amazement of his crew, their stern commander ordered the bodies of the mother and the negress also taken into his cabin, and it was done.

What it meant the crew did not know; but that night, when the little boy had been put to bed, the schooner was brought to, the bodies were sewn up in hammocks and weighted with heavy shot, and four men carried them on deck.

"All hands ahoy! to attend burial."

The order was obeyed and the crew mustered amidships.

"Caps off!" broke from the lips of the stern commander.

Promptly the men obeyed, and then, with no word of ceremony, the bodies were lowered into the sea, amid a silence that was most intense.

"Get the schooner under way again, and on the morrow hoist no flag above her decks," ordered the captain, as he turned and went back to his cabin, the crew wondering strangely at the change in their commander.

CHAPTER III.

THE BUCCANEER.

SAIL HO!

The cry came from aloft, on a small schooner-of-war flying the flag of the United States.

A fleet craft, for she went swiftly through the waters under a light spread of canvas. She was also a very handsome vessel, and all about her was in perfect ship-shape condition.

She was well-armed and her guns shone like gold, while every rope was in its place.

The crew were neatly dressed, and the officers were in full uniform, and a handsome, dashing-looking set.

At the cry from aloft, the senior lieutenant turned his glass upon the stranger, which had just come into view running out of an inlet upon the Florida coast.

He saw a schooner, perhaps a little larger than his own, and also armed. She carried no flag, and had evidently not yet seen the vessel-of-war coming down the coast.

"It is Basil, the Buccaneer, as sure as I live! Call Captain Randolph on deck, Midshipman Chandler!" cried the lieutenant.

His words created a stir among the officers, and also among the men who heard his order, and at once all was deepest interest on board the schooner.

The middy soon returned from the cabin, and saluting politely, said:

"Captain's coming, sir."

A moment after a man of striking appearance came on deck. He was tall, of dignified bearing, and possessed a face that was stern in the extreme.

He seemed to be brooding over the past to, judge by the look in his eyes, and the set expression upon his handsome mouth indicated silent suffering that he kept to himself.

His voice was kindly, however, when he turned to his senior lieutenant and said:

"Midshipman Chandler said that you wished to see me, Vancourt."

"Yes, Captain Randolph for yonder stranger shot into sight, coming out from the shelter of the land, and I am sure that it is the outlaw craft, Spiteful, commanded by Basil, the Buccaneer; but are you ill, sir?" and the lieutenant stepped quickly toward his commander, as he saw his face become livid and his form reel as though about to fall.

"No, no, Vancourt, I am all right; it was but a temporary dizziness—Basil, the Buccaneer, you said?" and as he spoke his voice was deeper than before, and the eyes had lost their sadness and become fierce in their brightness.

"Yes, sir, I am sure of it, for you know I was Basil's prisoner once for several weeks, and I know his vessel well."

"No, no, I did not know that, Vancourt. Tell me of it, tell me of the man," and Captain Rodney Randolph seemed deeply interested, while he leveled his glass at the stranger, who had now sighted the American vessel-of-war, and was crowding on all sail in flight.

Lieutenant Oscar Vancourt had also given orders to crowd canvas upon the Nemesis, and the two vessels were swiftly flying along before a breeze that was momentarily increasing in strength.

"It was when I was junior luff on the Vesta brig-of-war, sir, and we ran across the pirate one afternoon just at sunset. The wind died away, leaving both vessels in a dead calm and a league apart. But we decided to attack in boats, and I started with ninety men to seize the pirate."

"We had five boats, and went with muffled oars. The night was intensely dark, and we were near upon the schooner before we were seen. Then we went at her with a rush, and they opened a terrific fire."

CHAPTER II.

THE WAIF.

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In it were three persons. One of these lay in the stern, so motionless, so wan, that it could be seen that death had set its seal upon her lips forever.

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"All of our boats got to her side, but I was the only man who reached the deck, and a blow felled me, completely stunned.

"When I came to the fight was over, the boats had been beaten off and had retreated, and the pirate had his boats out towing the schooner away from the vicinity of the brig.

"I was in the cabin of the buccaneer chief, where his surgeon had dressed my wound, and I was being well cared for."

"You saw this outlaw, then, Vancourt?" asked Captain Randolph, who had listened with the deepest interest.

"Yes, sir, he came into the cabin and said that he regretted my wound, and would have me taken care of until he could land me at some port. He treated me well, sir, and did send me on board of a pilot-boat off Charleston Harbor, one day."

"Describe him, please."

"A man strangely like yourself in build, sir, but older by some years, with a bearded face and intensely black eyes."

"When was this?"

"Some six years ago, sir."

"Was there any one on board with him, Vancourt—I mean any prisoners?"

"I saw none, sir."

"No lady captive?"

"No, sir."

The captain sighed, and, after a moment, said almost fiercely:

"You are sure yonder craft is Basil, the Buccaneer's Spiteful?"

"Yes, sir."

"Lieutenant Vancourt, yonder man is the one I seek, so do not let him escape under any consideration."

"We are gaining, sir; but he will fight us to the last if he has to give battle, for he is a desperate, a daring man, and I only wish we had a larger crew, for he never goes short-handed."

"He shall not escape me, sir, and I would fight him were my vessel and crew half their size," was the decisive response of Captain Randolph; and after a long and steady look at the pirate schooner through his glass, he gave orders to crowd on every stitch of canvas his vessel would carry and then returned to his cabin, while Lieutenant Vancourt was deeply impressed with his conduct, as never before had he seen his commander's stern, quiet mien in the least ruffled.

"He knows this Basil, I am sure, and has some motive, other than his outlawry, in wishing to fight and capture him," said Lieutenant Vancourt, and he devoted himself closely to watching the sailing of the two vessels, and saw with great pleasure that the Nemesis was slowly gaining upon the Spiteful.

"It will be a desperate fight, for Basil the Buccaneer has vowed never to surrender his craft even to a line-of-battle ship and to fight her to the end," the lieutenant remarked, and he gave orders to get all ready for the combat which he felt sure must soon take place.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE FOE.

WHEN it was seen that the Nemesis was gaining steadily upon the pirate vessel, all on board were delighted at the prospect of capturing a prize; but when it became known that there was no doubt but that the chase was none other than the famous buccaneer craft Spiteful, old sailors shook their heads in doubt, for the schooner was short-handed and it was well understood that Basil the Pirate was ever willing to fight a vessel-of-war and had often beaten off vessels double his strength.

But, there was no coward heart on the American schooner-of-war, and if the captain said it was to be a combat to the death there would not be one to shrink from the ordeal.

The pirate craft was known to be fast, yet she did not seem to sail with the speed those on the vessel-of-war expected of her.

As the Nemesis drew nearer it could be seen that the pirate sailed heavily, and there was every indication visible that she had passed through a severe action, for great tears were in the sails and the hull and spars were considerably cut up.

Still the pirate pressed on under full sail, and seemed to be making every effort to escape from his swift pursuer.

The captain still remained in his cabin, but every now and then he would call up to the deck to know how affairs were and his face would grow brighter as he heard that the chase would soon be within good range.

"When we are within easy range, Mr. Vancourt, call me."

And again he became lost in deep meditation, his thoughts seeming to go back into the bitter past, for his face fairly writhed with deep emotion at times.

At last came the call from the deck:

"We are within easy range, sir."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Then to the deck went Rodney Randolph, and from his face every trace of emotion had passed, leaving it cold and stern as before.

He saw that the schooner was not over a mile away, but still pressing on under clouds of canvas.

A good ten-knot breeze was blowing and the vessels had it on their beam, while the Nemesis was driving through the water with a speed that was placing her rapidly nearer the outlaw craft.

"He seems to be crippled, Lieutenant Vancourt."

"Yes, sir; and that will place us upon more equal terms."

"I care not what odds he may have against us, for it is his victory or mine—his death or mine," was the stern reply.

"It is strange that he has not opened fire upon us, sir."

"He has not cared to throw shots away; but we are near enough now to let him feel our metal, but every shot must be aimed at his rigging."

"Yes, sir."

"Mind you, I shall put the gunner in irons who touches his hull, and so tell them. I wish them to cut down his rigging only."

"Yes, sir."

A moment after the bow guns of the Nemesis opened fire. The shots at first flew wild, for the gunners had in mind the threat of their captain and preferred to miss the pirate altogether rather than strike him in the hull; but at last they got the range, and the shot began to tear through the sails of the outlaw and here and there shiver a spar.

"It is strange, sir, that he does not show his colors," Lieutenant Vancourt observed.

"Yes, very strange; but you are sure it is Basil the Buccaneer's vessel?"

"I am more assured than ever, sir."

"He does not show his colors, nor does he fire back."

"Yet he is armed, sir, as you see, and his deck is crowded with men."

"I cannot understand it, Randolph."

"Nor I, sir, for it is not like Basil the Buccaneer, as he is always as ready to fight a cruiser as to capture a rich merchant vessel."

"Perhaps he is up to some of his tricks."

"Doubtless, Captain Randolph; but we are all ready for him," and the lieutenant glanced at the men, all of whom were at quarters.

"I am sorry that darkness is coming on, for the land is near, and the nights are very dark now, while there are plenty of hiding-places in shore, which he doubtless knows well."

"Yes, sir, but I hardly think he can escape us now, as we are gaining steadily."

"He must not escape us!"

"He must hang at the yard-arm of this vessel before another surprise, for I have sworn to hunt down that man to his death," was the low response of Captain Randolph, and his voice quivered with emotion as he uttered the words.

"I thought so," muttered Lieutenant Vancourt, as he heard what his captain said.

"I thought so! He hunts Basil the Buccaneer from some reason of revenge."

The schooners were now not more than three-quarters of a mile apart, and driving along at their utmost speed.

They were heeling well over under the pressure of the stiff breeze, and the schooner-of-war was keeping up a steady fire from her bow guns.

But the buccaneer had not once replied to the fire, nor had he raised the black flag above his decks.

What this meant no one on the Nemesis could understand, and they were suspecting some plot on the part of the pirate.

Soon the sun sunk behind the land and twilight rested upon the sea; still the pirate fled with all speed; still the Nemesis pursued and steadily gained, while her bow guns kept up a constant fire, and the iron shot tore through the sails of the chase and severely wounded the spars.

So far not a shot had struck the hull, the gunners being most careful to remember the threat of their commander to put them in irons if they touched the hull.

Then darkness fell upon sea and shore, and suddenly the chase squared away directly for the shore, going dead before the wind, and presenting a broadside squarely to the Nemesis.

All on board the cruiser expected a terrible broadside from the pirate, and yet, though his guns were run out he made no attempt to fire, but held on as a lento as before.

If the man-of-war's-men had expected that the outlaw craft was putting about to fight them, they were mistaken, for she was simply heading for the shore under full speed.

"He has some hiding-place there which he is seeking; so pursue him, Mr. Vancourt, for he cannot escape us now," eagerly ordered the captain of the Nemesis.

But ere the cruiser had well changed her course, sailing in an oblique way to follow in the wake of the pirate, the latter was close inshore and driving along at the same great speed, not taking in a stitch of canvas.

"By Heaven! he is running her ashore!" shouted Captain Randolph, suddenly.

As he spoke there came to the ears of all a mighty crash; the cloud of canvas above the decks of the pirate went down and the schooner was a wreck!

"I will board her myself! Lower away the

boats!" cried Captain Randolph; and the boats of the Nemesis, filled with men all thoroughly armed, were soon pulling rapidly toward the strange foe, who had remained silent under the cruiser's fire, shown no flag, and driven his vessel to destruction under the guns of his enemy.

CHAPTER V.

THE PIRATES' RESOLVE.

THE schooner which the cruiser had been in hot chase of, was the same which had picked up the boat at sea, in which were the dead bodies of the two women and the little boy.

The vessel was none other than the famous pirate craft Spiteful, and he who had ordered "Caps off!" when the dead were buried at sea, was her commander—a man feared on land and ocean for his many cruel deeds.

When he had ordered the bodies taken into the cabin he carried with him the little waif, and for a long time held him in his arms while he fed him with nourishing food; then he had placed the little boy in his own state-room and watched him until he sunk to sleep, after which he crept softly out to the cabin.

The body of the beautiful mother of the little boy had been placed upon a lounge, and that of the negress lay upon the floor.

The pirate's face was very stern as he gazed upon the dead and every atom of color had fled from it.

He stood by the lounge for a moment, gazing down into the sadly lovely face, and his features worked convulsively.

"Dead! Can it be?"

The words came in a tone of anguish from his lips, and stopping to the companionway he closed it to prevent intrusion.

Then he returned to the dead woman's side.

"Dead! my Luline dead! and you, too, my faithful Pris illa? What does it mean?"

"I pick you up in an open boat at sea, and my little boy of the three alone alive! He is suffering, too, and is too young to tell me what I would know. There is some strange mystery in all this, a mystery which I must solve."

"Lost to me for several years, and now, when I deemed them dead, they come to me, and death has done its work almost under my very eyes."

"But how strange that the boy lives!"

"For his sake I shall keep the resolve which flashed upon me when again I pressed him to my breast."

"I am rich—ay, immensely rich, even though it be the wealth of a pirate, and I will no longer float the black flag, but seek a home and live for my boy."

"He shall never know that I, his father, was a pirate, and he shall become a great and noble man."

"In this way I will seek to atone for the past all in my power by making him what it was never destined that I should be."

"I swear this by the dead here before me!"

He placed his left hand upon the head of the dead woman as he spoke, and dropping upon one knee raised his right hand toward Heaven.

Then he repeated in a low, earnest tone:

"Yes, pirate though I am, from this moment my career shall end, and I vow to rear my son in honor not in shame!"

It was after this resolve that Basil, the Buccaneer, had the bodies of the beautiful woman, his wife, and the negress, buried that night at sea.

The next day, to his sorrow, he found the boy raving in the delirium of a high fever.

Tenderly he bent over him, doing all in his power to save him from death, and seeming to care naught for his vessel or his crew.

Several sail had been reported to him, his lieutenant, Madrid, a dark-faced Spaniard, telling him that he was sure that the craft in sight were rich prizes.

"It matters not, sir! Hold on the course you are now sailing," was the rejoinder.

With a low-uttered oath the lieutenant left the cabin, and, returning to the deck, almost immediately went back to the state-room where lay the sick child, the chief still bending over him.

"There is a large armed brig in sight, Captain Basil, and she is in chase."

"Run from her, then, sir, if you wish to save your neck from the gallows," was the stern response of the pirate commander.

Again the lieutenant went on deck, and soon there came the deep boom of a heavy gun, and a shot went flying over the pirate vessel.

Instantly did Basil, the Buccaneer, run to the deck.

He glanced about him for a moment, beheld the brig two miles away in full chase of the schooner, which was under full sail.

At the peak of the schooner floated the black flag.

"Who raised that flag upon this vessel without my orders?" thundered the buccaneer chief, with flashing eyes.

"Lieutenant Miguel, sir," said the Spanish lieutenant, in a low tone, glancing as he did so toward a young officer standing not far away.

"Ha! my direct orders disobeyed and I defied? Take that, sir!"

As he spoke Basil fired at the lieutenant, who fell to the deck with a bullet in his brain.

"Haul down that flag, Senor Madrid, and if my orders are disobeyed again I shall visit death upon the disobedient one."

"Fly from yonder brig, but, mind you, not a shot shall be fired in response to hers!"

So saying, Basil, the Buccaneer, returned to the side of his sick child, and though the shot from the brig-of-war flew about his vessel, killing and wounding a number of his men and damaging the rig and hull of the craft, he went not upon deck, and seemed wholly oblivious of what was going on.

At last darkness came upon the sea, and the fleet schooner, in spite of her wounds, ran out of range and escaped her larger foe by running into a hiding-place inshore.

But, Basil the Buccaneer had another motive in running inshore, than alone to escape the American brig-of-war.

What that purpose was the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KIDNAPPED DOCTOR.

In his pleasant office, in a little town not far from the Atlantic sea-coast, a doctor sat, poring over a large work on medicine.

He had several severe cases of illness upon his hands and was reading up how best to save the patients from death and to alleviate their sufferings, for he was a man of humane impulses, as well as a skillful physician and surgeon.

One glance into his kind, noble face would inspire one with confidence, and it seemed that the smile he wore was forced there, as though to hide some bitterness in the heart.

A cheerful wood-fire burned upon the hearth, for the nights were chilly, and without the wind blew half a gale and moaned piteously about the eaves of the dwelling, which was a large old homestead just in the edge of the town, and surrounded by several acres of handsomely-improved grounds.

The office of the physician was in one wing of the homestead, and here alone was a light visible.

The approach to it was from a gravel walk, and along this a man, closely muffled as though to keep out the chill wind, walked at a brisk step.

Ascending the steps of the little piazza, he knocked at the office-door and was answered by a cheery:

"Come in!"

The physician had evidently not expected to see a stranger, for he looked up in surprise, as the man in sailor garb entered.

He had thought it was some call from one in the little town.

But being a stranger he rose politely and said:

"Good-evening, sir! Be seated, please, and say how I can serve you."

"You are Doctor Barton, are you not?" asked the visitor somewhat gruffly.

"I am, sir."

"There is one aboard our ship, sir, lying in the inlet below, who is very ill, and I came to you to go on board with me to see him."

"The vessel is some six miles from here, if she is in the inlet."

"Yes, sir."

"I have several very critical cases on my hands, and fear that I cannot go; so you will have to see another physician, my good man."

"No other will do, for you are head and shoulders over all. You must go, sir."

"I regret to say I cannot."

"I will give you five hundred dollars if you will," persisted the man, earnestly.

The doctor fairly started at the sum named, and gazed more fixedly at the visitor.

Then he said:

"The case must indeed be urgent for you to offer such a sum, but money will not buy me to neglect my duty to others, sir."

"A thousand dollars, sir, if you will go!"

"I am not to be bribed, sir."

"Then go for the sake of humanity, I implore you!"

The physician was silent an instant, and then he said:

"I cannot resist your appeal, sir, and I will go with you, though my horses must be the sufferers, as I will have to drive them hard, for I dare not be long away."

He quickly threw on his cloak, called a servant to bring his team around and went out, accompanied by the sailor, who said:

"I have a carriage, sir, if you will go with me."

"I will do so, and spare my own horses."

They entered the vehicle, the driver whipped up his horses and they fairly flew along the road, and were not long in covering the distance.

Drawing up at the shore, the driver threw open the door and the sailor and the doctor s. rung out.

A boat with four oarsmen was near, and in a moment more it was flying over the rough waters toward a vessel at anchor not far away.

"That looks like a vessel-of-war, sir," remarked the doctor, as the boat drew nearer.

"It is, sir."

"And I have been so busy with my own thoughts I really have not asked you about the invalid. You will pardon me, I hope, for it was your voice that recalled painful memories of my past."

"Doctor Barton, you need ask no pardon of me, for I, too, have been wrapt up in my own thoughts during my drive here."

"And who is the patient?"

"A child."

"A child on board ship?"

"Yes, sir; the captain's son, and I am the captain!"

"Ah! you did not give me your name, I believe, sir?"

"Basil."

"Indeed! how strange," and the doctor spoke more to himself than to his companion.

"The child is very ill, sir, with brain fever, and I have no surgeon on board."

"And how came you to seek me, sir?"

"I went to the town, sir, and of course heard you spoken of as the leading physician there, so sought you."

"But here we are alongside," and the sailor aided the physician to the deck.

Battle lanterns dimly revealed the guns and crew, but Basil gave the physician no time to look about him, but hastily led him into the cabin.

Doctor Barton had often been on board the vessels-of-war visiting the little port, and this one struck him as being so different from those which he had seen, for never before had he beheld such magnificence as his eyes rested upon in the cabin of the schooner.

There was the richest furniture, solid silver service, divans of silk and velvet, and weapons without number, the hilts set in diamonds and other precious stones.

"What is the nationality of your vessel, Captain Basil, for she cannot be an American cruiser, as she is so utterly unlike others of our war-crafts?" asked Doctor Barton, amazed at what he beheld, and he stopped and gazed about him.

Instantly the pirate chief turned and said, in his stern, deep voice:

"Doctor Barton, I brought you here to save the life of my child who lies in yonder state-room."

"To answer your question I would say that my vessel owns no nationality, for I, her captain, am Basil, the Buccaneer, and your own brother, Doctor Loyd Barton!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BUCCANEER BROTHER.

The words of the daring man, who had so boldly kidnapped him and brought him aboard of his vessel, caused Doctor Barton to utter a cry of commingled amazement, horror and pain.

He started back, holding up his hands as though to ward off some grim specter, while he cried:

"You! you my brother?"

"Yes, I am your brother, Basil Barton, and I should think I had given you cause enough to remember me," was the cool reply.

"Hail do you dare gloat over the cause you have given, and fling it in my teeth? Do you dare do this, Basil?"

All unarmed though he was, and within the power of his brother, Doctor Barton stepped forward and laid his hand heavily upon the other's shoulder, while he looked with blazing eyes into his face.

"Loyd Barton, I brought you here not to quarrel with you, nor did I mean to gloat over my wrongs upon you. I said that I supposed I had given you cause ever to keep me in remembrance."

"Why did you bring me here?"

"To save the life of my child."

"You have a child?"

"Yes."

"A pirate's child?"

"If so you will."

"A boy?"

"Yes."

"Better let him die than grow up to know what his father is!"

The face of the buccaneer chief darkened; but, checking his anger he said with deep emotion:

"Loyd, I will not quarrel with you, for I brought you here, as I said, to save my child, who hangs between life and death. For Heaven's sake save him, for I know your wondrous skill."

"Ah! you have kept me then in remembrance!"

"Yes, I have visited the town, our old home, in disguise, and—"

"Hold! one moment!"

"Well?"

"There is a tomb erected in the old burying-ground, and it was put there by night, and mysteriously—at least I, nor others, ever knew of its existence, until one day we went there to bury my mother, our poor mother if so you will. I saw it then, and it bears on it the inscription:

"TO THE MEMORY OF

CELESTE BARTON.

One more unfortunate."

"Did you place that monument there, Basil Barton?"

"I did."

"I read by it that Celeste is dead."

"She lies beneath it."

"What! she is buried there?"

"Yes, I carried her body there by night, along with that marble slab, and my men dug her grave and buried her there."

"Her grave dug by pirates?"

"She was a pirate's wife, so why not?"

"Oh, Basil! you, my sinful brother, now call upon me to save your child from death! You, who came back from your voyage at sea, and whom I took to visit the beautiful girl whom I hoped to make my wife. When you went to sea we loved each other well, Basil, and you seemed all that was noble."

"You came back, grown from boyhood to manhood in the eight years that passed after your going, and your nature seemed greatly changed."

"You won from me the woman I loved, you urged her to fly with you and she did so, fascinated by your handsome face and villain's tongue."

"I followed you, and, forgetting that you were my brother, sought to take your life. You well-nigh took mine, for you left me wounded, and, as you believed, dying."

"I returned to my home, and tried to cheer the latter years of our broken-hearted parents—broken-hearted because rumor said that you had become a pirate, and that poor Celeste was a pirate's bride, and you had so nearly been Cain-accursed by killing me."

"Our old father went first, Basil, and a year after our mother died, praying to God to the last to bring you back in honor."

"Then it was, when we buried her in the old family burying-ground, seven years, that I saw your monument."

"Now you come to me and ask me to save your child, the child of my would-be Cain-accursed brother, and the child of the woman who was false to me almost upon her bridal eve."

"Now is the time, Basil Barton, for my revenge, for, pirate though you are, you love your child."

Doctor Barton had spoken in a low, earnest tone, and the buccaneer chief had stood before him in an attitude of apparent dread.

When Loyd Barton ended with his threatening words, of the time having come for his revenge, the pirate started, his face paled, and he cried eagerly:

"No! no! you would not do that, Loyd. You are not what I am, a man without heart. I have wronged you—bitterly have I wronged you, I admit."

"I filled the ears of Celeste with falsehoods about you, and, in despair, rather than for love of me, she fled with me."

"She married me, yes, and then she discovered that the vessel I owned was an outlaw craft, and it broke her proud nature."

"She discovered that I was false, that you were true, and one night, in her despair, she sprung into the sea, for I carried her upon my vessel with me. I rescued her from the sea, but she never spoke after I got her again in the cabin."

"I buried her on the seaside, and for her own sweet sake, for she was a noble woman, I had that monument carved, and when it was done, carried it along with her remains to our old burying-ground."

"That is the story in its truth, Loyd, so you need not hate her memory."

"And her child?" hoarsely asked the doctor.

"She had no child, for this one is my child by another wife."

"One more unfortunate! I well understand now the words upon poor Celeste's tomb. You are a curse to humanity, Basil Barton, and as such I pity you; but as you are such, so rise I higher in the scale of honor and humanity, and I will do all in my power to save your child. Lead me to him!"

A cry of joy broke from the lips of the buccaneer, and he said, earnestly:

"God bless you, Loyd, my much-wronged, but most noble brother!"

"Such a prayer from your lips, sir, I consider but as mockery! Lead me to your child," was the response.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAVED!

TRUE to his promise, the noble brother did all in his power to save the child from death. He found him with a burning fever and raving with delirium.

Had Doctor Barton felt that his brother was deceiving him, as to its not being the child of Celeste, he would have been undeceived after seeing the boy, for not a trace of resemblance was there to the woman whom he had so madly loved, and whom he had never forgotten, for LO-

other had he asked to become his wife, and in bachelor comfort he passed his days at the old homestead which his father had left him, for Basil had been disowned.

Doctor Barton had brought with him his case of medicines, and all that his great skill could do, he did, to save the life of the suffering child, while the father, whose whole soul seemed wrapped up in the boy hung over him in breathless suspense awaiting the verdict from his brother's lips of hope or despair.

"Loyd, I have done all in my power for your son, and nothing more can be done for hours, so I hope you will not detain me here, while others, equally as ill, depend upon me?" said Doctor Barton after he had been an hour at the bedside of the sick child.

"You must remain here until my child is out of danger," was the decisive reply of the pirate.

But his words aroused the lion in the nature of Loyd Barton, and he said fiercely:

"Are you worse than a brute, Basil, to detain me here when others demand my services, and I can do nothing for your child until I see the result of my treatment of him?"

"You must stay here."

"If I am compelled to, I will stay; but I vow to you by high Heaven, that you cannot force me to do aught more for your child. He must take his chances, for I will die, ay, you can swing me up to the rigging of your vessel, before I will do more to save him."

"Now, sir, detain me against my will, if so you intend."

Basil saw that the brother was in deadly earnest. He knew his nature well, and he felt that no threats could intimidate him. So he felt compelled, for his child's sake, to yield; but he put it upon another reason, and said:

"Do you suppose that I would be fool enough to release you, that you might go up to town and send a vessel-of-war down here upon me, for there is a handsome price upon the head of Basil, the Buccaneer."

"Basil Barton, your own evil nature causes you to suspect others. I would not touch blood-money were I ever so poor; but I am rich, and have no need of gold that I might get by betrayal of you."

"I have no love for you now, only pity, yes, and scorn; but you are my brother; we both had the same mother and father; we were boys together and happy in the long ago. You went to the bar and I held on to a career of honor. And now I pledge you that honor and my word to it I will return to your vessel in five hours, if you will permit me to go."

"Keep me here by the power you have to do so and your child may die for all I will do to save him."

"You pledge me your honor you will not speak of my vessel being here?"

"Yes."

"And that you will return within five hours?"

"I do."

"But the driver of the carriage which I hired?"

"Keep him here if you fear him, and I will drive the team back again."

"I will trust you, but if you fail me, beware!"

"I care not for your threats, Basil. I will do my duty in all things."

"I believe you," was the reply.

Ten minutes after Doctor Barton was driving back to the town, while the driver of the vehicle was taken on board the pirate schooner to await the return of his team, and he was in great alarm for he had discovered that the craft was a buccaneer, though little he dreamed that its commander was the brother of the famous physician of the town, whom all respected so highly.

The wind had died away with the rising of the moon, and Doctor Barton sent the horses at a rapid pace along the country road.

As he drew near the town he suddenly turned off from the highway, and in a few moments drew rein at the side of a small inclosure, encircled by a white picket-fence.

Within were visible several tombs, the white marble glimmering in the moonlight.

Before one of these he stood with uncovered head and low-spoken words fell from his lips.

"Poor Celeste! Here above your grave I implore forgiveness for my cruel thoughts of you. You fled from me, but I know now that you were not false-hearted, and that he who caused me so much misery broke your own loving heart. No longer, Celeste, will I remember you with bitterness, and may God hold you in His loving keeping!"

A moment the man stood in silence, hat in hand, and then, with a deep sigh, turned away, leaped over the low fence, and springing into the vehicle once more, half an hour after stood at the bedside of a patient who was hovering between life and death.

"A marked change for the better," he said to the one who had followed him to the door.

Then to another bedside of the sick he drove, and his face clouded as he saw that all hope was gone.

"I could not have saved her had I been

here," he muttered, and then he left the dying one to the care of her mourning kindred.

Stopping at his own house he procured some medicines he wished to use with the little boy lying in the cabin of a pirate craft, and then the heads of the tired horses were turned back to the sea-shore.

Thedawn was breaking as he drew rein upon the desolate shore; but a boat awaited him, and when he had cared for the horses, for he had brought grain from home for them, he once more went on board of the vessel of his buccaneer brother.

"I dare not say God bless you, Loyd, after your words to me that my prayers were like a mockery; but there is a change for the better in my darling child," and the doctor saw tears of joy in the eyes of the pirate as he spoke.

"I hoped for the best, Basil, and the medicine has done its work well. Yes," he added, as he laid his hand upon the little fluttering pulse; "the fever is not near so high, his skin is moist, and if no unfavorable change comes within the next two hours your boy will live."

"Thank God! but you, Loyd, are haggard and worn out. I will watch by the boy, while you get a couple of hours' sleep before breakfast."

"Sleep on board this craft! Why, did I close my eyes such phantoms of the butchered and tortured would rise before me that I would go mad?" and the doctor shuddered as he uttered the words.

"As you please, doctor," was the cold reply.

"No, no, I dare not go to sleep here; but I will remain for several hours and I will watch by the side of your boy while I am here. If the fever is broken you will need me no longer, for your good nursing will soon bring him around, and for the love you bear him, Basil, I implore you let him not follow in your footsteps, for better would it be that he should die now in his innocence, than become a sea outlaw."

"He shall never know what his father was; he shall lead a life of honor, Loyd, I pledge you."

"God grant it!" and Doctor Barton went back to the bedside of the little boy.

Thus several hours passed, and the buccaneer came to summon him to breakfast.

"No, Basil, I will return home to breakfast. I could not touch food on board your vessel. Your boy will live, for his fever is broken, and he needs only good nursing."

"Good-bye, Basil, and pray God we never meet again!"

The buccaneer uttered no word in reply, but escorted his brother to the ship's side, called for the driver to be sent for, and bowed in silence as the boat pulled ashore.

When the boat returned he gave orders to get up anchor and set sail, and it was when the fleet schooner shot out from the shelter of the land that she came in sight of the American cruiser Nemesis, and started off in flight, showing no flag, firing no gun in response to the shots of the American vessel-of-war in chase.

CHAPTER IX.

THE THREAT.

WHEN Captain Basil discovered the schooner-of-war Nemesis, it was with the deepest chagrin that he had left his secure hiding-place in the inlet.

Since he had found the drifting boat, which contained his dead wife and living son, he had determined not again to raise the black flag.

He had been a man of indomitable pluck, as well as possessing merciless impulses, and his nature was such that he preferred to fight a cruiser rather than run from her.

He gloried in the excitement of deadly combat, and never had been more in his element than when in desperate peril.

But for some reason he had changed his mind, and had fled from the brig without firing a shot, while the unfortunate Lieutenant Miguel, who had raised the black flag at the orders of his superior, Marco Madrid, had been mercilessly shot down, as the reader has seen.

With his child growing more desperately ill, the buccaneer had determined to seek the aid of his brother, whom he had so deeply wronged, and who he knew had become a famous physician.

That brother, who had revenge in his hands, had proven his skill and had saved the pirate's child.

But now, with his vessel crippled and but two-thirds of a crew, the buccaneer found himself pursued by a fleet foe and one whom he had cause to dread.

Was it to be his doom to hang at the very moment when a new life was opening to him in the love of his child?

No, he would not be hanged, and yet he would not fight.

He did not doubt but that, with his heavy battery and well-trained crew, he could beat off the schooner.

Yet, he who killed for the love of it, he who had robbed defenseless ships upon the high seas, had made a vow above the dead body of his wife to haul down his pirate flag, to turn his guns no more upon an American vessel, and he meant to keep it, be the cost what it might.

A strange contradiction was the nature of this man, for, after he had stolen poor Celeste

from his noble brother, and had broken her heart by his piracies, he had taken her body to a grave among her people and placed over her ashes a marble tomb.

Now, red-handed pirate though he had been, he meant to keep his vow made over the body of another woman whose life he had destroyed.

"Crowd on all sail, Mr. Madrid, and do all you can to outfoot that nimble schooner," commanded the buccaneer chief, leaving the side of his child and going on deck when he heard that the Nemesis was rapidly gaining upon him.

"We could check the speed of the schooner, sir, did we open fire with our stern guns," replied Lieutenant Madrid.

"No, sir, I will not fire upon the vessel."

"Then he will take us, sir."

"No, I will never surrender my vessel, Señor Madrid."

"Ah! if you fight him, sir, there will be no need to surrender, for we can whip him off easily."

"I shall not fight him, sir."

The pirate officer looked mystified.

"Not fight and not surrender? What on earth does he intend to do?" he muttered.

There was one thing certain, and that was from Señor Madrid down to the cabin-boy all on board had perfect confidence in their chief.

He had extricated himself from so many perilous situations, he had beaten off foes double his size, and he always brought riches to his crew, that he was fairly idolized and yet greatly feared.

The lesson upon the officer Miguel, had been a wholesome one to Marco Madrid.

He knew that Miguel had died for what he had ordered him to do.

Had Captain Basil known him to be the culprit, he would have shot him instead of Miguel.

He never allowed dictation from officers and crew, and was cruel as death if forced to punish his men.

So it was, that remembering most vividly the tragic end of the young second officer, Marco Madrid was most cautious in talking to the chief about what he meant to do.

When, however, the fire of the schooner in their wake began to make them feel her shots, in rigging and spars, and several men had been severely wounded by splinters, the Señor Marco Madrid sought the cabin to report to his commander.

"Well, sir?" cried Basil, the Buccaneer, turning from the bedside of his little boy.

"The cruiser is gaining rapidly, sir, and we are suffering in men from the splinters, though the schooner's fire seems all directed at our rigging."

Basil, the Buccaneer stepped to the stern-posts and glanced out over the waters.

"Yes, she is gaining," he said quietly.

"She will overhaul us within the hour, sir."

"Yes, about in that time."

"What am I to do, sir?"

"Darkness is coming on, but it will not help us."

"No, sir, for she is too near."

"Take my advice then, Señor Madrid, and buckle on your belt of jewels and gold."

"I have done so, sir."

"Then tell the men to do likewise."

"Do you intend to give up the ship, sir?" asked the Spaniard, almost driven to madness.

"I intend to do as I please, sir, so go on deck and obey my orders," was the significant reply.

The Spaniard obeyed, hastily leaving the cabin; but, going forward among the men, he called them about him and said quickly:

"Men, the finding of that boat, with the dead woman in it, and that boy, has turned the captain's brain. He is mad, utterly mad, as his actions prove, for he refused to fire upon the brig, killed poor Señor Miguel for simply raising the flag, as has been our custom when seeing another vessel, and now he threatens to surrender the the craft, and this means that he will go free and the rest of us suffer."

"Shall this be, men?"

The black looks that rested upon every face proved that the subtle words of the lieutenant had their effect, and half a hundred voices said in chorus deep and threatening:

"No, we will not be sold!"

CHAPTER X.

A MUTINOUS CREW.

MARCO MADRID, the pirate officer, saw a chance before him to realize his long-cherished dream.

He was anxious to become the ruling spirit of an outlaw crew. He had long been jealous of the power of Captain Basil, and yet he had not dared show it.

He wanted a vessel and crew of his own, and more, he wished the Spiteful.

"He knew that, when in trim, she was very fast, in fact, had never met her equal in speed.

She was a perfect sea-boat, her armament was of the finest, and Captain Basil was known to have a vast wealth on board in precious stones. How much the pirate officer could only guess.

If he could secure the vessel, and the riches of the buccaneer chief were as much as the designing Spaniard hoped, then he would be content.

to leave the sea and enjoy a life of luxury for the remainder of his days.

If not, with the schooner and her crew he had the means of obtaining more.

Then, too, Marco Madrid had another reason for getting possession of the schooner.

That reason was to avenge himself upon Basil the Buccaneer for a certain act in the past which will be made known in good time.

He hated his chief and he wished to get revenge, wealth and power all at one fell swoop.

He knew that Miguel had been true to his chief, and anxious to get rid of him he had ordered him to hoist the flag, contrary to Basil's orders, feeling assured that it would turn out just as he hoped.

And so it had, in the death of the young officer at the hands of the chief.

Now, with Basil in deep grief over the sick child, which Marco Madrid alone of all on board knew to be his son, and the cruiser coming on in hot chase, while the chief seemed indifferent, the treacherous lieutenant felt that the time had come for him to strike.

His orders to the crew to get their belts on, which contained their riches, gave him the opportunity, and he at once felt that, by declaring the chief mad he was master of the situation.

He had just gotten the pledge of the crew to act, at his command, when one of the men at the wheel called to him that Captain Basil wished him to come at once to the cabin for a minute.

"Await my return, men, and then we will act," he said hastily, and he went to see what it was that Basil, the Buccaneer, wanted with him.

He walked hastily, for the schooner still gained upon them, and her fire was kept up as hot as ever.

As he stepped down into the cabin he was suddenly confronted with a pistol thrust full in his face, and stern came the command:

"Hold out your hands, Sir Traitor!"

Marco was caught wholly off his guard. He had not yet armed himself for the combat.

In his face frowned the pistol, and he saw deadly determination in the face of the pirate chief.

Who had betrayed him?

Certainly the chief knew of his treachery, for he had called him a traitor.

In one instant his bright dreams turned into a hideous nightmare, and he could only wonder why Basil did not kill him then and there.

"Hold out your hands, sir!"

The order was repeated more sternly than before, and in an agony of fear he obeyed, while he stammered forth:

"What do you mean, Captain Basil?"

"I will tell you in another moment, sir," was the reply, and first upon one wrist, then upon the other, the iron handcuffs were securely clasped.

"Sit there, sir!"

The man dropped into the chair with a groan of despair.

Then a chain was quickly passed through a ring bolt in the cabin floor, and was twined over the ironed wrists, completely fastening the man to his seat.

"Traitor, I suspected you, as I suspect every man, and so I slipped forward and through the open hatch heard your plot with the crew to mutiny, so sent for you."

"I could kill you, but I will leave you to a worse death. Your doom is sealed, for I shall run this schooner ashore and you perish in the wreck," said the buccaneer, in a voice that quivered with rage.

So saying Captain Basil quickly left the cabin and appeared upon deck.

The men shrank away under his blazing eyes, and glanced about for their ringleader.

"Men, Marco Madrid, the traitor, will not be able to lead you to mutiny, as he promised, for he is in my power, so you had better obey me. If you do not obey I shall blow this craft and all on board to atoms by firing the magazine. Will you obey?"

And the voice of the buccaneer run like a trumpet.

The men were dumfounded.

Their captain had perhaps killed the lieutenant, and now boldly faced them.

Their mutiny was too incipient thus far for them to cling to it, and under the eye of their chief they wilted.

"Speak! will you obey me?" thundered the buccaneer chief.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

A perfect roar of voices replied.

"It is well for you. Now get your treasure belts on, for I shall run this schooner ashore and take to the woods. It is our only chance. Stand ready all for orders!"

The men obeyed with alacrity.

There was not a dissenting voice, not a laggard in obeying.

"At the helm, there!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Let her fall off dead before the wind. Stand ready at the braces, all!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

Then the schooner swept away before the wind and headed for the shore.

Into the cabin dashed the chief, and, a moment after, he came on deck holding in his arms a child enveloped in a cloak.

The cruiser had also changed her course and came on in chase; but the pirate craft was flying along under full canvas and heading directly for the shore.

"Steady as you are, helmsman! Hold hard, all!"

Then with a crash the schooner lurched upon the shore, and every man was thrown down by the shock, while the following seas boarded her and swept her decks, the roar of waters drowning the shriek of the mutineer officer confined in the cabin.

CHAPTER XI.

A VILLAIN'S RUSE.

WHEN Captain Rodney Randolph, of the schooner-of-war Nemesis saw the pirate vessel drive ashore under full sail and become a wreck, he at once gave orders to come to and let the anchors go.

This was quickly done, and the boats lowered with marvelous dispatch, the captain himself going in his gig to board the wreck.

The sea was not running very high, and the boats made good headway until they neared the wreck.

On board all was silence and darkness; but a blue light was quickly burned in one of the boats and it revealed the position of the pirate craft exactly.

She lay upon a bar, upon which she had driven half her length under the terrible impetus of wind and waves, and all her canvas set that could catch a capful of breeze.

The waves were breaking over her stern, but her bows were almost out of the water, while over them hung the wreckage of her masts, sails and rigging.

At once Captain Randolph decided to beach his boats and board over the bows, for he could not but think that many of the crew were still on board the wreck.

The nimble sailors promptly obeyed orders, and springing out into the surf carried their boats safely ashore, dragging them beyond the reach of the waves.

"Follow me, lads!" cried the gallant captain, and they went with a cheer at a rush for the wreck.

Over the bows they clambered, expecting a withering fire, and yet none came.

They gained the decks, and here and there, crushed in the wreckage, was a pirate, dead or dying, but no one opposed their way.

Back to the cabin the captain led his men, and, lantern in hand, he entered, though the seas were breaking into the companionway.

"Ha! what is this?" cried Captain Randolph, as his eyes fell upon the Spaniard, chained in his chair and half drowned from the incoming seas, while he was also nearly dead from fright.

"What does this mean, sir?" cried Captain Randolph, as the lantern revealed the dark face of the Spaniard.

"It means, Señor Captain, that I was left here to die, by that cruel, red-handed pirate," responded the cunning Castilian.

"You are one of his crew?"

"Holy Mother forbid, señor! I am a Cuban planter, and was taken by the pirate to be held for ransom, which refusing to pay, as I had not the wealth demanded, in his hatred Basil, the Buccaneer, chained me here to die in the wreck," said the cunning outlaw.

"Set him free, men," ordered Captain Randolph, and one of the keys of the handcuffs brought along for pirate wrists soon unfastened the irons upon the prisoner, and he warmly grasped the American's hand, while he poured forth a torrent of gratitude.

"How is it, sir, that you wear the uniform of a pirate off'er?" asked Captain Randolph, not over well pleased with the man's face.

"Ah, señor! I was robbed of all I had, and one of the outlaw officers, a young Spaniard, the Señor Miguel, gave me this suit, and for it Basil of the Red Hand, as we call him in the West Indies, shot him dead."

"The monster! and where is he now?"

"I hope at the bottom of the sea with his crew, Señor Captain, for the sea following the schooner swept her decks, and all must have gone."

"I hope not, for that man Basil should die at the yard-arm," almost fiercely said Captain Randolph.

"Señor, while a prisoner of the pirate I learned that he has a home in Cuba. I know it well, though little I dreamed that it was the home of Basil, the Buccaneer. Without a vessel, or crew, he will go there, for he had with him his sick child—"

"His child?" cried Captain Randolph excitedly.

"Yes, Señor Captain, his child—a little boy scarcely five years of age."

"He was a man to fight hard for life, and with his boy he would make his way to Cuba, seek his home, and it is there that you will find him if he has escaped death."

"You are right, sir; and you say that you know this home?"

"I do, Señor Captain."

"I will go there; but this schooner will not go to pieces and I would examine her well under the light of day and then give her to the flames."

"And to-morrow you will set sail for Cuba to visit the home of Basil, the Buccaneer, for it is on the coast?"

"I will."

"Then there is yet hope of revenge against Basil, the Buccaneer, if he yet be alive," said Marco Madrid with the intensest hatred in his voice and look.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SLAVER.

BEFORE I follow the career of the strange man known as Basil, the Buccaneer, I will ask my reader to cast a retrospective glance with me a few years back, to better acquaint him with the early life of him who became famous as an ocean outlaw.

In the old homestead, where Basil Barton went by night, for his brother to go and visit his sick child, the two, the doctor and the buccaneer, were born, the former being the elder by several years.

Their parents were well off, were of good family and held high anticipations for the future of their two handsome boys.

In earlier years the two brothers were inseparable, and Loyd was ever the champion of his young brother, who, as he grew older, began to be a little wild and reckless.

He was an athlete, and became noted as the most daring swimmer and rider among his companions, while he preferred to spend the day with his rifle in the woods to attending school.

Finding that the boy would have his own way his father sent him, with his brother, to boarding-school.

There Loyd soon stood at the head of his classes, while Basil became the leader in all wild sports.

One day Basil was missed from the school, and a note to his brother told him he had gone to carve out his fortune in his own way, well knowing how useless it was for him to try longer to run in the ruts of restraint.

Over a year passed before his parents heard from him, and then came a letter from a foreign land, accompanying which was a package containing a number of costly souvenirs for his father, mother and brother.

He wrote in good spirits, did not speak of what career he was following, but it certainly seemed that he was doing well.

Another year passed away and a letter came from China, also accompanied by a package of souvenirs.

It was written on Christmas day, and spoke of home, and he stated that the bearer, an old sea captain, could tell them of him.

But the old captain could only tell that he was looking splendidly, had grown tall and very handsome, and seemed well supplied with funds.

What Basil was doing for a living he did not know; but no suspicion of wrong entered the hearts of his parents or brother, the latter having finished his studies and settled down to the practice of medicine in his native place, and at once began to get a liberal patronage, for his worth and intelligence were well known.

Another year, and again came a letter and gifts.

This time it was written from the coast of Africa, and many rare curios were sent of the country.

Still, Basil Barton uttered no word in his letters as to what he was doing, and his mother said fondly:

"The dear boy will come out well, after all, and he is certainly getting rich, to send us such handsome presents. My prayers for Basil will be answered, I know."

And the wanderer, thus loved and prayed for?

He had run away from school to go to sea, and, shipping before the mast, a cruel destiny seemed to mark him for its own as soon as he cast adrift from those who loved and cared for him.

The vessel upon which he had shipped was bound to Spain, and was a richly-laden brig.

No sooner had she gotten out to sea than a mutiny was raised, the vessel was seized and headed for the West Indies, where her cargo was sold to secret agents, and she then set sail for Spain, under false papers.

Basil had fought on the side of right, and his courage and strength, in defending the captain, had won the admiration of the mutineers; but he was knocked down by a stunning blow on the head, and recovered to find himself in irons.

When given the alternative of joining the mutineers or going overboard, he chose the former, and his reckless daring caused him to enter into the spirit of the lawless act and cast his fortune with the tide.

In Spain, with a snug sum in his pocket he left the vessel, and it was then that he wrote his first letter home.

From Spain he went to India and China, go-

ing as a sailor, and determined to work his way up.

Thus drifting about, he one day found himself in Havana.

He possessed a considerable amount of money, gained in most questionable ways, and rigging himself out in splendid attire, he strolled into one of the gorgeous gambling salons of the city.

Watching a game played between a handsome Spaniard of thirty and others, he came to the conclusion that there was trickery between three of the players against the fourth—the Spaniard, who was losing heavily.

Watching closely, Basil saw that the partner of the Spaniard was in secret league with the others to fleece the victims, and, when a large sum was being raked over to the fraudulent trio, it was suddenly seized, and a voice sung out with:

"Senor Spaniard, these three devils are allies and are cheating you—they have marked cards!"

"Ha! say you so, señor?" said the Spaniard, while the accused men sprung to their feet, and one of them rushed upon Basil with a knife, but only to be seized in a grasp that was resistless and hurled to the floor with a force that completely stunned him.

In an instant Basil followed up his triumph by springing upon the others, who were preparing to attack him.

There was a short struggle, and while one man fled, the other remained dead upon the floor.

"You have killed him, señor, but he deserved it. I was a fool to be so victimized. Come with me!" the Spaniard spoke, and, in the excitement the scene had caused, he drew Basil Barton from the *salon*.

"Senor, those gamblers are all-powerful in this town, and you are a stranger. They will give you trouble, so where will you go?"

"I have no business here, señor; I am a wanderer and a sailor, so I will ship for a voyage," was the reply.

"Then come with me, for I command a vessel here and she is ready to sail at once."

"I thank you, señor; I will get my kit at once from the tavern and be with you."

"You do not ask what service I am in, Señor Americano, for such I take you to be?"

"I do not care, señor, so long as I am aboard ship!"

"You are the man I seek, then, and I have a berth of second mate open for you, for I was delayed here merely to get a good officer. But, let us hasten, before the captain-general's hounds get upon our trail."

They hastened along to the tavern where Basil was stopping. There he secured his traps, and, in ten minutes after, they were on board of a schooner, which at once set sail out of the harbor.

"She has beautiful lines, señor, but looks rusty," Basil remarked, with a true sailor's eye glancing at the vessel.

"She will look very differently under a new coat of paint, and with bright canvas—all of which I have on board. I am now going to a secret anchorage to fit up, for it don't do to have too fine a craft go into Havana, when her papers won't bear investigation."

"Ah! a pirate?" coolly asked Basil.

"No, señor, a *slaver*. There is more money in it," was the equally cool reply, and the Spaniard eyed his new-found friend closely to see the effect his words had upon him.

But, Barton's face was unreadable, for he had learned well to conceal his thoughts and keep his own secrets.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE ISLE OF PINES.

THE destination of the schooner, which her captain had boldly said was a *slaver*, was the Isle of Pines, a safe retreat at that time for secret expeditions to fit out in.

The schooner had entered Havana as a coast trader, the sentinels that paced the frowning castle of El Moro little dreaming that they were looking down upon a vessel which had caused more human misery than any other craft then afloat.

Captain Corti, as the Spaniard called himself, certainly had the appearance of a gentleman, and it was whispered among his crew that he had been a Spanish Don, but had fallen from grace.

Certain it was that he had made several successful trips as a *slaver*, and, after landing the unfortunate slaves upon the coast of Cuba, had gone into the port of Havana under false colors, to get for his vessel all that was needed for a complete fitting out for another voyage to the slave coast.

He was living in luxury the while, and a victim of a mania for gambling, he had gone to the *salon*, where he was being cheated out of his ill gotten gold when Basil Barton's keen eye detected the situation of affairs and he interfered in behalf of the Spaniard.

Sailing for the Isle of Pines, the Sea Venus, as Captain Corti called his schooner, was to meet there her full crew, which the first mate had been secretly shipping in Havana, and was to bring to the isle in a lugger.

The men on the schooner, some half-dozen in number, were at once put to work, when the Sea Venus dropped anchor, in transforming the vessel into the beautiful craft that she really was.

On the run from Havana Basil had acted as mate, and Captain Corti had been delighted with his young *protégé*, feeling convinced that he had found a treasure in him.

When the lugger arrived, the first mate was accompanied by some thirty men, a set that were ready for any deed of deviltry, and a young man, his friend, who he said was to be second mate of the schooner.

"I have a man for the berth, Sanchez, so your friend can serve as third mate," said Captain Corti, addressing the first officer, who was an evil-faced Cuban.

"Señor Captain, my friend will not serve as third, so your man will have to take that berth," was the reply of Sanchez, who had already heard of Basil's presence on board, and how the captain had said he had a mind to put him in first place.

"Señor Sanchez. I generally command my vessel to suit myself, and my man takes the second mate's place," was the calm reply.

Sanchez saw that the captain was in earnest, and so said:

"I will speak to Señor Waldo and ask him to take the third place."

"Do so."

Señor Waldo was spoken to by the mate, and at the same time urged to remain firm and the captain would yield; so the two approached Captain Corti, where he stood talking to Basil.

"Well, señors?" said Corti as they approached.

"Señor Captain, as you bade me get you a good man for second mate, I did so, and here is Señor Waldo to fill the place. He says that he will not yield the berth."

"Then he will not go on my vessel," was the decided response.

"You forget, señor, that I have it in my power to report you, if so I wish," remarked Waldo, a look of menace on his evil face.

"Ah! you threaten, do you?" and Captain Corti dropped his hand upon the pistol in his belt.

"Hold, Señor Captain! This man secured the crew for us, and they will act for him," said Sanchez, hastily.

"One moment, señors," and Basil stepped forward.

"Well, señor?" said Captain Corti.

"As I seem a bone of contention, Captain Corti, permit me to resign my claim to the berth of second mate."

"No, Señor Americano, I owe you a debt of gratitude, and more, you are a man whose equal I cannot readily find, while, at the same time, you are companionable to me."

"If Señor Sanchez is not satisfied, he and his friend, ay and their crew also, can go."

Meaning looks passed between Sancho and Waldo, which Basil noticed, then he said:

"As you so decide, Señor Captain. I am ready to meet Señor Waldo in personal combat—the victor to take the berth."

This bold challenge was a surprise, but it seemed to meet the favor of the two Cubans at once, for Waldo answered:

"If the señor will meet me with swords, yes?"

"Certainly, please yourself as to the weapons," was the indifferent reply.

Captain Corti was more than ever pleased with his *protégé*. He knew of Waldo, and that he was a desperate man, and a superb swordsman, but he had noted that Basil did all things well and felt little anxiety for the result, but he decided to interfere should the American be in danger of death.

Swords were at once sent for; the old crew of the schooner, and the new men were called, and the two combatants took their places.

"This is for life or death, señor?" and Waldo smiled threateningly as he asked the question.

"For life or death, señor," was the reply, "if so you prefer."

"Then have at you!" and the Cuban sprang to the attack, expecting to at once run his adversary through.

But he was neatly foiled and had his cheek laid open for his lack of caution.

Like an enraged tiger he again forced the fighting, and so fierce was his attack, so strong and so skillful, that Basil gave ground; but, only for an instant. Then he seemed to gather in his reserved power, and hold his own for a while, as if playing with his antagonist. Soon, however, he began to press the Cuban, whose face now became livid. In another instant his sword pierced his adversary's right hand, almost severing it at the wrist.

"Señor Waldo will never be second mate of the Sea Venus," he remarked, calmly, while Captain Corti gripped his hand in admiration of his nerve and skill.

"Perhaps you would like to step into my shoes, Americano?" sneered the slaver's first officer, glaring upon Basil Barton with hatred and malice in his looks.

"As the señor pleases."

"This affair was of your seeking, Sanchez, so

you are to blame for the maiming of your friend for life. If you wish to push the matter, do so now, for I am sure Señor Basil will accommodate you," and Captain Corti seemed quite willing to see the affair go further.

But Sanchez had learned a lesson, and had no desire, upon second thought, to face so deadly a foe, so he replied:

"Señor Captain, the affair has been settled by the sword, and Señor Basil wins. Unless he demands my berth, I have no quarrel with him."

"I did not demand the berth of second mate, señor, but given me, as it was, by your captain and chief, I decided to have and to hold it against all comers. That is my way. As between you and me, let us be friends, for in perilous work we must work together, not as foes, but as mates," and Basil frankly held out his hand.

The Cuban grasped it, and said:

"I am glad of the friendship of a brave man, señor."

But as he turned, leading Waldo away, he decided in his treacherous soul:

"That man shall die by my hand!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ASSASSIN.

WHEN the Sea Venus sailed away from the Isle of Pines, there was no better equipped craft afloat, or one more beautiful to the eye of a true sailor.

She was of perfect mold, with razor-like bows rising very high, and a bowsprit that ran far out over them, giving a chance for the spread of enormous jibs.

Her masts were very tall, raked gracefully and set far apart, which also allowed of a very large foresail.

Her mainsail was immense, and she carried also a fore-squaresail, huge topsails and all the canvas which in those days was spread upon a schooner.

Her stern was overhanging and trim, and her depth enabled her to stand up well under her vast amount of canvas.

She carried an armament of four pivot-guns, eighteens, and a crew of forty-fighting-men besides her officers, and certainly was a dangerous craft.

Flag she had none, simply raising that which suited her best in time of need.

Captain Corti boasted that he was no pirate, simply a "free trader," as he called his inhuman traffic in kidnapped Africans; but he wished to go well prepared to protect his vessel against any ordinary foe.

With the coast of Africa guarded well by American and English cruisers, and Cuba also watched by vessels-of-war, to put down the slave trade, it was a most perilous undertaking to attempt to procure and land a cargo of unfortunate Africans, and required nerve, daring and skill in the commander of a slaver.

These qualities Captain Corti possessed, and his first officer, Sanchez, was a valuable ally, in that he had been for years in the slave trade, and did the meaner and brutal work devolving upon him, which his commander would not stoop to.

When the Sea Venus sailed Basil found himself already a favorite with the crew. They had seen him tried, and his handsome young face, superb form and pleasant manners won him the regard of all.

Sanchez seemed particularly pleased with the young officer, and did all in his power to atone for his first dislike for him.

From the Isle of Pines the Sea Venus set sail for Fernando Po, near the coast of Africa, where Captain Corti expected to see his African agent and learn just where to go and pick up a cargo of slaves.

He could also there refit for the voyage back to Cuba, should the schooner need repairs after her long run.

Though chased several times by cruisers on the run to Fernando Po, the swift Sea Venus dropped them rapidly astern, and thus proved herself a splendid sailer, as well as a staunch craft in the half-dozen severe storms she encountered.

One and all were, therefore, delighted with the craft.

The young mate also proved himself a most competent officer, and he was always ready to relieve Captain Corti and Señor Sanchez from any duty that he could.

After running into Fernando Po as a trader, with her guns below deck, Captain Corti got the information he desired, and set sail for the point on the coast of Africa where he was to get his human cargo.

It was the same point which Sanchez had several times visited before, and he acted as pilot, running the schooner into the river by night, and finding a secure biding-place for her.

As it would take some days to get the negroes on board, from the corral where they were kept in hiding by the traders, while awaiting shipment on the slavers, Basil Barton took a gun and started upon a hunt through the forests.

In spite of the seeming great friendship which Señor Sanchez had shown him on the voyage, Basil had never trusted him, though pretending

to do so. He had seen that the mate was very friendly with some of the most villainous of the traders, and he had caught him one day pointing to him and talking in a low tone.

He had appeared, however, not to notice it, and took care to tell Mate Sanchez that he was going out for a hunt, and to ask him where it was best for him to go.

The Cuban had warned him to be cautious, and given him other advice and then Basil had started upon his jaunt. He had not gone very far before he felt that he was being followed, and so at once determined to act.

Seeking a thicket he hastily drew off his coat and hat, and stuffing them with moss I ant them up against a tree, as though he was sitting there and had gone to sleep.

His rifle leaned near the dummy figure, while pistol in hand, he skipped away a few paces and waited.

Soon he saw a head peer over a bush and gaze at his supposed self. Then he beheld a gun raised and aimed steadily at the dummy.

He recognized the face of one of the hangers-on about the traders' post, and the very man whom he had seen Mate Sanchez talking to, in r ference to himself.

Following the report of the assassin's gun came the crack of Basil's pistol, and the man fell in his tracks, while a wild shriek of pain and terror broke from the villain's lips.

In an instant Basil was bending over him, his clutch upon his throat.

"Be still, you fool, or I will kill you, for you are not fatally hurt, for I merely broke your arm."

"Oh, yes, chief; do not kill me!" cried the African, who was, in reality, the servant of a trader and had been captured in childhood from his tribe.

"Who told you to kill me?"

The man did not reply.

"Speak, or I will kill you."

"The Sea Chief."

"Sanchez?"

"Oh, yes."

"Come with me and tell the truth, if you wish to save your life."

Taking his coat, which had been riddled with slugs, the young slaver led his prisoner back to the post, and at once sent on board for Sanchez and Captain Corti to come ashore.

Suspecting not that trouble was in store for him, Mate Sanchez accompanied Captain Corti to the hut to be suddenly confronted by his intended victim and hired assassin.

"Hold on, Señor Sanchez, I have you under my pistol-muzzle," cried the young mate, and then he told Captain Corti and those present just what had happen'd.

"Now, Señor Sanchez, if I have got to be killed, I don't intend your hired assassin shall stab me in the back, and if I have to kill, you are my game, so let us settle right now the grievance you seem to have against me," and Basil dropped his hand upon his pistol, the Cuban doing likewise.

But Captain Corti suddenly stepped between them and said, sternly:

"Hold! Sanchez, go on board the schooner at once!"

The Cuban bowed and obeyed.

Then the Spaniard continued:

"Señor Basil, I place you in command of the schooner at present, and my orders are that you go on board and at once string that cowardly assassin up to the yard-arm."

"But, señor, I prefer—"

"Hold, señor! I will not allow you to risk your valuable life against that villain. Besides, I am selfish, for you are most valuable to me. So obey, Señor Basil, or you are no longer officer of mine."

Basil hesitated an instant, then bowed and retired from the hut.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET EXPEDITION.

WHEN the young mate went on board the Sea Venus, he saw that Sanchez had arrived before him.

The senior officer looked as black as a thundercloud, and was talking in a low, earnest tone to a group of seamen, when Basil went down to the shore and hailed for a boat to be sent for him.

The moment he set foot upon the deck he perceived that Sanchez was plotting mischief, and so his arrival was opportune, for some of the wildest spirits of the craft were inclined to lend a willing ear to any act of mutiny and violence.

But Basil acted promptly, called the men ast, and at once ordered Sanchez seized.

The men hesitated.

It was a critical moment indeed, for a straw would weight the balance for or against him.

"Men, that man hired a negro to assassinate me, in the woods. But, I suspected him and so trapped him. I offered to settle the grudge he held against me as I did with the Señor Miguel, but Captain Corti refused to allow me to meet a cowardly assassin, and gave me my orders and command of this craft until they are executed."

"Seize that man, I command you!"

The men hesitated no longer. The bold young

mate had them under his eye and they obeyed. With bitter oaths Sanchez resisted and tried to rush upon Basil, but was quickly secured.

"Now rig a noose rope and swing that man up!"

This order fairly startled the crew.

Again they hesitated, but again came the ringing command:

"Dogs, do you dare me?"

They shrank under the fierce gaze turned upon them and then in a moment more Sanchez stood with a noose about his neck, while a seaman was aloft with the other end of the rope passing it over the yard of the huge square-sail.

"Now, Señor Sanchez, if you dare utter a prayer to Heaven, do so at once!"

The Cuban was livid with rage and fear combined. He could not believe that Captain Corti meant he should be hanged, and yet he had a fearful dread that it might be so.

The men also seemed to feel that it was to turn out a farce, for Captain Corti was nowhere to be seen, ashore.

"You have two minutes to live, Señor Sanchez, so cease your curses and say your prayers!" cried Basil, who was at once the coolest man upon the deck of the Sea Venus, as he was the most concerned.

Then a silence like death fell upon all. The Cuban ceased his bitter oaths and stood in dread silence, his head bowed.

Could it be that it came to him in that awful moment that he was indeed to die?

Who can tell?

But his lips moved and no oath issued from them.

Then the silence, which was appalling, was broken by the clear, penetrating voice of the young slaver:

"Swing him up!"

The men hesitated, hardly believing that it could be so, that a junior officer had become the executor of his senior.

"By the skies above do you refuse?"

The words fairly thundered from the lips of the young sailor, and he walked briskly toward the group of men, who held the rope.

He had not taken two steps when up into the air went the form of Sanchez, the Cuban slaver.

He had uttered no other word, and offered no further resistance, dying in grim silence.

"Make fast!"

The order was obeyed promptly and the Cuban was left swinging in the rigging, while the crew stood gazing alternately at the bold young mate and the dying man above their heads.

"Ahoy the Sea Venus!"

The voice from the shore broke the spell upon the crew.

It was Captain Corti, and he was hailing for a boat.

One was quickly sent ashore, and the men wondered if Basil had exceeded his authority.

Breathlessly all waited the coming of the chief.

He sprung on board, glanced up at the swinging form and called out as he advanced toward the young mate:

"Señor Basil, you have done your work well, and I congratulate you."

Then he turned to the crew and continued:

"Men, this gentleman is first mate of this vessel now, and the man who swings yonder at the yard-arm was a cowardly assassin."

"Cut the body down and throw it into the sea."

Then Captain Corti entered his cabin, motioning to Basil to follow him.

Without again referring to the tragedy just enacted upon the deck of the vessel, the Spaniard said:

"Señor Basil, I have just had some unpleasant news."

"Indeed, señor?"

"Yes, and we are caught in a trap."

"How is that, señor?"

"An American vessel-of-war has landed a small party upon the coast below, and their aim is evidently to make a secret march inland toward this point."

"They will discover the trading-post, then?"

"Yes, and the schooner."

"Is there nothing to prevent it?"

"Well, yes, and you are the man to do it."

"I will do all in my power, sir."

"I feel that, Señor Basil."

"The truth is the cruiser would not dare send her back up the river, fearing they would run into a trap, and so a party has made a secret landing, intending to come by night across the country and strike the river to see if the rumor is true that a trading-post is at this point."

"If they discover it, the cruiser herself will come up the river, or land a large force to send by land, and the schooner and post will be burned and the slaves freed, which would ruin us."

"Certainly, sir."

"Now there are a band of slave-hunters here, as you know, and you have told me that you ride well, an accomplishment that I do not possess, and I wish you to go as their leader, ambush these Americans and cut them to pieces, for not one shall escape."

"Then I will send a runner to the cruiser,

with a line pretending to come from the officer in command, for the vessel to meet them at a point some leagues up the coast, and while the vessel has gone there we can run out of the river in the schooner and escape, for I will at once begin to pack the black cattle on board."

"Will you do this, Señor Basil?"

"I am ready now, sir," was the reply of the young slaver.

An hour after, mounted upon a fine horse and dressed as a desert robber, Basil rode away from the river trading-post, at the head of two-score wild horsemen, and a guide directed them to a point where they would head off the invading American sailors, who were reported as being fifteen in number.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WARNING ON THE DESERT.

A FINE-LOOKING American brig-of-war had been cruising along the coast of Africa for some months, hoping to capture some daring slaver running out of the rivers with its cargo of unfortunate Africans.

As the day passed away and no prize was captured, and the commander had every reason to believe that a slave corral, or trading-post, was some leagues up the river, a gallant young officer, a former lieutenant, volunteered to make an excursion inland with a small force of men and strike the river at a point where it was believed that the Man-Hunters had their camp.

The captain of the brig-of-war, dared not send his boats up the river, well knowing that they might be surrounded and the crew massacred, if there was a corral near, for the Man-Hunters fearlessly guarded their captives and fought desperately to save them from capture.

Should it be ascertained that there was a corral up the river, the captain of the cruiser would boldly sail up there, risking all dangers, to rescue the unfortunates; but without positive knowledge he could not so take the risk.

It seemed to him plausible that a party of men could make their way across a comparatively deserted country and reconnoiter, and he accepted the offer of the daring young lieutenant, Rodney Randolph, without hesitation.

"You will go by night, halt all day and press on during the next day, Lieutenant Randolph."

"When you strike the river, if you find no evidence that there are corrals upon it, and slavers hiding there, awaiting for cargoes, follow the stream down to the mouth, and thus back to the ship."

"I will encamp a force ashore, as a support, and anchor the brig in the mouth of the river until your return, which I hope will be within four days."

Such were the instructions which Rodney Randolph received, and the next morning a boat put the daring young officer and fourteen men ashore, to start upon their perilous undertaking.

Having mapped out his course, as well as he could from an imperfect knowledge of the river's windings, he set off upon the march across the arid plains bordering the coast just there.

Each man carried a knapsack of provisions and all needed for the tramp, and the party had been picked for their powers of endurance.

After a march of several miles into the interior they halted until nightfall, not caring to press on by daylight for fear of being seen by some of the natives.

They little dreamed that the traders had spies upon the shore, watching the movements of the cruiser, and that already word had gone to the post that a party of fifteen armed men had started inland to strike the river at a point which would surely discover to them the corrals.

When night came on Lieutenant Rodney Randolph took up his march again, and at a pace that must carry him over the ten leagues between him and the river by daylight.

It was just midnight when he halted his little command for rest in a thicket where there was good water at hand, and the tired men, after a hearty supper, threw themselves down to rest, the young officer telling them that he would stand guard.

He walked to the edge of the thicket and then stood gazing out over the desolate plain.

Suddenly he started, for at his side stood a tall form, and he had not heard the footfall of any one approaching.

"Hold, sir. I am here as a friend, not a foe."

The voice was deep and musical, the English perfect, and yet the speaker was clad in the full costume of a Desert Robber.

At first Lieutenant Randolph had supposed it to be one of his men.

But a glance, even in the starlight, proved that he was mistaken.

"In the name of Heaven! who are you?" and Rodney Randolph's hand was upon his pistol.

"Your friend, I said, for I, too, am an American," was the reply.

"An American?" asked the surprised officer.

"Yes."

"And where?"

"Yes."

"In that garb?"

"It is all I have, sir; but to explain, let me tell you that I am here to warn you."

"Of what?"

"Of death."

"Ah! what have I to fear?"

"You have heard of the Desert Robbers, also called the Man-Hunters of this coast?"

"Who has not?"

"I would warn you that they are the ones you have to fear."

"I am not alone and my party are well armed."

"You have fourteen men, on foot, well armed, and yet a mere handful to the force of Man-Hunters now lying over yonder ridge, directly in your path."

The officer started in spite of himself, for the words of the stranger told him that his night march was known.

The stranger seemed to realize this and continued:

"You came from the American brig-of-war at the mouth of the river, and you are going surely to your death."

"How do you know this?"

"Ah, sir, spies have been upon you, and I well know the flag of my country when I see it, and I saw the Stars and Stripes waving over your deck but yesterday."

There was a touch of sadness in the voice of the speaker, and the young officer noticed it.

"Why is it I find you, an American, here in Africa, and in the dress of a Desert Robber?"

"Ah, sir, my lot is a sad one, for I am a prisoner."

"A prisoner, and yet free?"

"Yes, sir, I was captured on the coast, with several shipmates, for our vessel was wrecked some leagues above here, and we are closely watched."

"I came forward to reconnoiter, our captors well knowing that I would not escape and leave my comrades in their hands."

"I came to warn you to at once put back to the coast, while yet there is time, for with the dawn a hundred horsemen will ride you down, and you will be either cut to pieces without mercy, or become captives like my comrades and myself."

"So I beg you to go, as I have risked my life to warn you."

"I thank you from my heart, sir, for your warning, and I will at once heed it, for well I know, as our expedition is known, death alone awaits us."

"But you must go with us."

"And leave my poor comrades, sir?" was the quick reply.

"You can do them no good by remaining."

"Oh yes, for I am with them, and misery loves company, it is said," and the stranger smiled.

"You are a noble fellow, and I pity you while I admire you, and I hate to leave you here in cruel captivity."

"It cannot be helped, sir; but perhaps, as our band goes from here up to the Red Cliffs, thirty leagues along the coast, my fellow-captives and myself might manage to escape if we knew there was a vessel near by we could reach."

"There shall be, for Captain Porter will be only too glad to go to that point—say two nights from this, and we will have boats off-shore awaiting you."

"I know the cliffs you speak of, and all you have to do will be to hail, and some one in the boats will hear you and land."

"Oh, sir, this is noble of you, and we will make the attempt, two nights from this; but now I beg you to go."

"One moment."

"Yes, sir."

"Are there any slave corrals on the river?"

"There were, sir, but there are none now, for a slaver carried off a cargo several weeks ago."

"And we missed her! It is too bad."

"But are there no slaver vessels in the river now?"

"No, sir."

"I am glad to hear this at least, and—"

"I beg you not to delay, sir, as I was sent to see if you were here in the thicket, and if I delay they may come after me."

"I will start at once; but I wish my men to see you, and know just why we turn back."

"Come with me."

The lieutenant led the stranger into the thicket and aroused his men, hastily telling them the warning given him.

The men were greatly surprised at sight of the stranger, who hastily repeated his words to the lieutenant and again urged him to depart.

The men were only too anxious, fully realizing their danger, and quickly they got ready for the retreat, forming in line without the order to do so.

"Now, my noble friend, I shall hope to see you two nights from this."

"I will be there with my comrades, sir, if it is in our power to escape; but delay no longer; go!"

"One question more—your name?"

"Basil Barton, sir—Hark! I hear hoof-falls—I fear you have delayed too long."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SLAVER'S RUSE.

WITH the startling words of the pretended captive of the man-hunters, that he feared he had delayed his retreat too long, Rodney Randolph grasped the hand of Basil Barton and hastily moved off after his men.

The young slaver stood in the shadow of the thicket, watching the retreating forms of the sailors, until they had faded from view, and then he said aloud:

"It is better so."

"I am an American, and, wicked as my life is growing, I would not let those demons kill my countrymen."

"Without sacrificing those poor fellows, and that daring young officer, I have accomplished my purpose, for he will report to the brig's commander that there are no slavers in the river, no cargo of slaves in the corrals awaiting to be shipped to Cuba."

"The brig will leave the mouth of the river and sail to the vicinity of the Red Cliffs, hoping to aid me and my pretended fellow-captives to escape from a cruel captivity."

"Then the Sea Venus can run out, and all will be well."

"It is better so."

So saying, he turned away from the thicket and walked slowly across the plain.

Passing over a slight ridge he came to a horse fastened to a small bush, and mounting him he continued on further inland.

It was not very long before he came to a desert camp.

A score of horsemen were lying upon the ground, while their horses, fastened to their long spears stuck into the ground, were grouped in a circle near them.

Several arose as the young slaver approached, and one said, in fair English:

"Did the master see the white dogs?"

"Were they not at the thicket, as your guide said?"

"I saw them not, for they had retreated."

"They had become afraid and returned to their vessel," said Basil, in response to the guide and interpreter, who had reported to him two hours before, he having gone ahead, that the party of armed men were making toward the very thicket where he had seen them.

"Ah! they fear to come further, and run like frightened dogs of the desert."

"But our horses are fleet and we can catch them," said the interpreter, who was very anxious to kill an American, it seemed.

"No, we cannot follow them, for I must return to my vessel and be ready to run out."

"If they have gone back we need not fear them."

The Man-Hunter did not like this and he showed it; but a blow full in the face from the fist of Basil, which felled him to the ground, quickly silenced his grumbling and cowed him completely, for he saw that the young sailor knew just how to deal with him.

The Man-Hunters were upon their feet in an instant, but unheeding their movements, Basil gave the order to mount, and the interpreter quickly repeating it, they obeyed, for they felt that they could not afford to quarrel with a slaver who brought them gold in return for their black captives.

The young sailor had heard Captain Corti tell of how to deal with the Man-Hunters, and his first experience in that way had convinced him that the Spaniard was right, and he muttered to himself:

"They are but a cowardly set of curs, after all."

Back to the river he wended his way, the wild lot of Man-Hunters following him, and it was just breakfast time when he boarded the Sea Venus and joined Captain Corti in the cabin.

"Well, my young friend, I am glad to see you back again!" cried the Spaniard.

"And I am glad to get back, sir, I assure you."

"Well, what luck?"

"If you mean by luck, señor, how many men we have killed, I have had no luck."

"You did not find the American invaders, then?" anxiously asked the Spaniard, and ere an answer was given he continued:

"If you missed them, they have struck the river at another point, and have doubtless gone back to report, so we may expect the brig-of-war upon us by night."

"No, sir, they have gone back, and upon their reaching their vessel she will sail for the Red Cliffs, which you pointed out to me down the coast on our way here."

"But how know you this, Señor Basil?"

"Captain Corti, you may perhaps be angry at what I have done; but I hope not, sir, when you hear all."

"Come, out with it, señor."

"I led the Man-Hunters to a point some seven leagues away and halted, as I had sent the guide and interpreter on ahead."

"He returned and reported that the party were moving in a direct line for a thicket, as though to rest there, and leaving the men I went there."

"I hitched my horse over a ridge out of sight, crept near and came upon the officer of the

party, who was standing guard, while his men slept."

"You did not kill him?"

"Oh, no, señor, but I told him I was a captive of the Man-Hunters, who were in large force, and also had several of my companions, who, with myself, had been wrecked on the coast some time before."

"I told him that I had been sent out to reconnoiter, and that he must at once retreat."

"He urged me to go with him; but I said I would not leave my comrades, but, as we knew that there was an American vessel off the coast, we would try and escape, two nights from last night, and reach the shore at the Red Cliffs."

"He said the brig would go there to meet us, and then I urged his hasty retreat."

"He did so, and thus I got the brig out of our way, so that we can run out, and did not have to massacre men, whose death might bring to this part of the coast a number of cruisers and thwart our future success."

"I cannot blame you, señor, but must admit that you acted wisely; but had these men been—well, say Spaniards, you might not have been so merciful to them."

"Perhaps not, señor; but they were my countrymen, and I was merciful," was the frank response.

"Again I say I do not censure you, señor."

"But did the officer not ask about there being slavers in the river?"

"Oh, yes, sir, and I told him there had been, but a slaver had carried off the cargo of blacks, and the camps had been abandoned."

"Good! Now, as soon as you have breakfasted send a runner down to watch if the brig departs for down the coast, and then we'll get our cargo aboard and be ready to run out."

"Yes, señor."

"And no better cargo of blacks ever went out of Africa on a slaver, Señor Basil than the seven hundred that we will carry with us," and the eyes of the Spanish slaver brightened at the thought of the golden harvest he would reap when he had landed the poor wretches in Cuba.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DESERT KING.

OFF the African coast a brig-of-war was lying-to.

It was night, and yet the stars shone brightly and gave considerable light, so that her rig was seen to be American.

Along the shore half a dozen boats, with muffled oars pulled slowly to and fro on regular "beats," and keeping about half a mile apart.

The shore was wild in the extreme, and a bold cliff, which in daylight had a red hue, cast a shadow out upon the waters.

To and fro the boats pulled, and the eyes of those in them were strained in watching the shore, their ears on the alert for the slightest sound.

But no sound broke the desolation of the scene, other than the roar of the surf as it fell in lazy waves upon the beach, or beat against the cliff.

Thus the hours passed away, until just before dawn a roar like mimic thunder was heard, and the waning moon, just rising, cast its glimmering light upon the form of a huge lion that stood upon the cliff gazing out upon the sea.

It was a desert king, and he had scented the presence of human beings.

"I will go ashore and try for that grand beast, for fortunately I have my rifle with me," said an officer in the boat nearest the cliff.

"It is a big risk, Lieutenant Randolph," a middy responded.

"I shall take it, for it will be a feather in my cap to kill a lion, and that looks like the largest of his species."

"Does not his presence on the cliff, sir, seem to indicate that no human being is near?" asked the middy.

"It certainly does, and I fear that that noble fellow who saved us from death two nights ago, and his party, will be unable to meet us."

"I hope not, sir, for it must be a fearful thing to be the captives of these Desert Robbers," and as he spoke the middy, who had the tiller, called to the men:

"Way 'nough!"

The oarsmen ceased rowing, for the boat had been going shoreward, and a moment after they sprung out and made a safe landing through the surf.

Instantly Rodney Randolph grasped his rifle, which he had brought on the cruise with him, hoping for a chance at some big game, and fortunately had with him in the boat, expecting that they might have a brush with the Man-Hunters, if they pursued their captives, for he had no reason to doubt the well-concocted story told him by Basil Barton.

The lion still kept his stand upon the cliff, and in defiance uttered another savage roar that made the men stand close to the boat, ready to put out through the surf again should he take a fancy to stroll along the beach.

But Rodney Randolph was a gallant hunter.

His early life had been passed upon a plantation in the South, and he had often hunted bear, deer and panther when but a boy.

Now he thirsted for a chance to kill a "king of beasts."

Slowly up the cliff he made his way, his rifle ready for the foe, and his pair of pistols in his belt, should the former fail him.

He knew that he risked death; but he loved danger for the excitement it gave, and was a man of indomitable pluck and nerve.

The lion stood gazing out over the moonlit sea, seemingly curiously regarding the brig, a mile distant, and the patrolling boats a few hundred yards away.

He was switching his tail nervously from side to side, and yet otherwise stood like a statue.

When Lieutenant Randolph reached the cliff, he was just about seventy yards from the desert king.

He saw that the lion had not discovered him, and he raised his rifle to fire.

"I don't wish to be an assassin, so I will at least give him warning," said the plucky young naval officer, leveling his rifle.

"I will give the desert king fair warning."

Then he stood ready and gave a loud, ringing hallo.

The desert king did not start at the presence of a mortal enemy.

He merely turned his head in a most dignified manner and regarded the officer for a moment, as if with calm contempt.

The middy and his boat's crew could see both the hunter and his game, from where they stood upon the beach below.

The occupants of the patrolling boats also beheld what was going on, and while the men rested upon their oars all eyes were turned upon the daring officer and the lion.

The moon was now some distance above the horizon, and in that latitude the light was most brilliant, so that all within a radius of half a mile could be distinctly seen.

To the surprise and horror of the watchers, Rodney Randolph, with his rifle at a ready, walked slowly toward the lion.

The tail of the beast began to switch more rapidly, and opening his capacious mouth he sent forth an appalling roar of defiance.

Then he dropped upon his haunches, as though ready for a spring upon the daring man who was advancing upon him so fearlessly.

It was a fearful moment for the lookers-on, and yet none dared call to the lieutenant to come back.

He had not hesitated in his advance, at that fearful roar, and still kept steadily on.

Nearer and nearer, until another roar broke from the savage jaws, and then, quick as a flash the rifle went up to the shoulder, a stream of flame shot from the muzzle and the report rung out upon the air.

With a wild roar, ending almost in a shriek, the lion sprung toward his foe, when again there came a shot, this time from a pistol, and then another from the brave sailor, who did not move from his position.

He had dared to face the desert king and he would not fly from him.

Spillbound all below gazed upon the scene.

They saw that the rifle-shot had wounded the lion, they beheld his spring upon his foe, then the two pistol-shots rung out and the monarch of beasts fell almost at the feet of his destroyer.

"Ho, the cutter!" called out the victor.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the middy, almost shouting in his joy, while cheers rung forth from every boat.

"Send the crew of your boat up here for my game, Midshipman Vancourt."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Half an hour after the "big game," terrible even in death, was in the boat which was pulling for the brig.

The other boats slowly followed, for the "captives" had failed to come.

"We will patrol again to-night for them, Vancourt," said Rodney Randolph, as they neared the vessel.

As the desert king was hauled on board the brig a wild cheer greeted his gallant slayer, for the lieutenant was a great favorite with his men.

As all stood regarding the beast, which was one of the largest of his race, the sun was rising and from the lookout came:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?"

"Off the starboard stern quarter as we now are, sir, and she's as trim as a pirate."

"Or a slaver—which she is."

"All hands to make sail, for there is game bigger than this desert king," cried Lieutenant Randolph, and he went into the cabin to report to his commander, while the brig sped away after the rakish-looking stranger that was standing out from the African coast under full sail.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHASING A SLAVER.

In the excitement of having sighted what was confidently believed to be a slaver, the lion and the supposed "captives" were forgotten, and all on the brig devoted themselves to the duty of overhauling the stranger.

The vessel, when discovered, had been standing along the coast under easy sail.

But those on board had sighted the brig about the same time that she was discovered, and her course was at once changed, she heading out to sea.

The wind was off-shore, blowing about a six-knot breeze, and steadily increasing with the rising of the sun.

The stranger was a schooner, very trim in build, with raking masts, and carrying a very large spread of canvas.

"Is she not armed, sir?" asked Midshipman Vancourt, addressing Lieutenant Randolph, who was in command, as both the captain and senior lieutenant were ill with fever, contracted upon that unhealthy coast.

"Take my glass, Vancourt, and go up aloft and see, for I cannot tell from here."

The midshipman obeyed, and after quite a long stay hailed the deck:

"Ho the deck!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"She carries four pivot guns, sir, one forward, one aft and two amidships."

"What size, think you?"

"About eighteen, I should judge, sir."

"And her crew?"

"Perhaps half a hundred men, from those I see on deck."

"Can you make out her colors?"

"The flies none, sir."

"Then she is a slaver beyond doubt," and Lieutenant Randolph gave orders to have more sail crowded upon the brig.

The order was obeyed until the pretty vessel-of-war was under every stitch she could carry.

The brig was a very fleet craft, and for that reason had been selected for that station, especially to catch the nimble slavers.

But somehow she did not seem to gain upon the chase.

The schooner, for schooner it was, went flying along without her topsails, but with all her lower sails set that would draw.

She glided along with surprising speed, and held her own with the brig.

"I believe we can reach her with the bow pivot, sir," said Midshipman Vancourt, coming from aloft.

"Try it," was the laconic response.

A few moments more and the roar of the heavy bow-gun on the brig boomed out over the waters.

The shot was well aimed and was seen to cut through the huge mainsail of the schooner.

Instantly, almost, the topsails on the chase were set, and she began to forge ahead and drop the brig.

But the wind was increasing, the sea rising, and the schooner was observed to be staggering under the pressure of canvas.

"We will catch her yet, for see, she cannot carry her topsails in this blow, and with the sea running higher and higher," cried Lieutenant Randolph.

With her topsails taken in, the chase barely held her own with the brig.

Then men were seen going aloft and the topmasts were housed, for the schooner reeled well over under the gale that had now begun to blow.

The brig stood her canvas well, and, being larger in hull than the schooner, met the waves better.

But still the schooner sped along, though it was soon evident to all that the brig was slowly, very slowly gaining.

"If this wind and sea keep up, she is surely ours."

"But if the gale blows out, she will drop us," said Rodney Randolph, closely eying the chase through his glass.

The bow-gun of the brig kept up a steady fire, but the sea was too rough for good aim, and the shots flew wild, except now and then when one would cut through the schooner's rigging, though doing little damage.

After an hour longer it was seen that the brig was steadily gaining, for the sea was getting rougher, and the gale still held on.

Suddenly Midshipman Vancourt called out:

"They have thrown something overboard, sir!"

All eyes turned upon the wake of the schooner, to see what it was, and soon Lieutenant Randolph cried:

"I see it!"

No one asked a question as to what it was, for naval discipline forbade curiosity in inferior officers.

But Lieutenant Randolph did not keep them long in suspense, for he added, with deep feeling:

"The inhum'n fiends! they have thrown two of their unfortunate cargo over for us to pick up."

Muttered oaths against the slavers were heard upon all sides, and every eye was upon the young lieutenant.

Would he stop to pick up the poor wretches, and thus take big chances of losing the schooner, or would he leave them to their fate, and hold on after the slaver?

It was a moment of aw'ful suspense.

The two blacks were now seen in the sea, tied

to some floating object, and humanity called loudly for their rescue.

On the other hand hundreds of their fellow-beings were suffering torment below the schooner's decks, as they were being borne away to slavery in a far-away land.

True, their condition might be bettered by life in another land, from what it was in their native wilds of Africa; but then the question was that the traffic, of stealing them from their home and kindred, was inhuman and illegal, and their robber masters were no better than pirates.

The honor of a clever capture, in the absence from command of his superior officer, would be Rodney Randolph's, if he stood on after the schooner.

He would rescue hundreds of poor blacks, capture an armed schooner, win a prize and fame, while he would bring the guilty slaver and his crew to the punishment they deserved.

On the other hand to sail by and leave those two wretches to die in the sea, would be a crime.

"I shall pick them up if I lose the schooner by it."

"Stand by all to lay to!" came from the lips of the humane and plucky officer.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SLAVER'S ROMANCE.

"OVER with another pair of blackbirds, for as the humane commander of the brig picks up those two, Señor Basil, he will come to for the others and that will get us out of range."

The speaker was Captain Corti the slaver.

He had run out of the river, when the brig had been reported as having gone, and standing rather further down the coast than he had intended, had sighted her off the Red Cliffs, as has been seen.

To his surprise he found the brig a far faster sailer than he had expected, for the Sea Venus had been always wont to drop astern any pursuer.

"You build fast vessels in your country, Señor Basil, I have noticed," he said, as the brig began to gain.

The young mate made no reply, and Captain Corti continued:

"She is picking us up, surely."

"Bring two of those black cattle from the hold and rig them to a spar, and we'll see how much humanity yonder Yankee has."

The order was obeyed, and the two unfortunates, shrinking with terror, were rigged to a spar.

Then they were tossed into the sea, in the wake of the Sea Venus, and all on board eagerly watched the result.

"He will pick them up!" cried Captain Corti, with great glee.

Then he gave orders for two more wretches to be thrown overboard, as in the words that open this chapter:

"To feed that voracious Yankee tiger," as he expressed it.

The other two followed the fate of the others, little dreaming that though they took big chances against death in the sea, they were going to liberty, at least, and far better treatment on board the brig.

The brig also delayed for the other two, and in that time the slaver had run out of range.

Then, too, the gale was blowing itself out, the sea was running down, and the Sea Venus was forging ahead more rapidly, so that her daring, but cruel commander felt no longer any dread of the brig.

"I have noticed, Señor Basil, as well as have been often told by old slavers, that you Yankees always stop for an African thrown overboard, even if you lose a prize thereby."

"Now, English, French and Spanish commanders are not so merciful."

"I might throw half the cargo into the sea, and a Spanish commander in chase of me would drive his vessel right over them to catch my craft."

"It would be the prize he would seek, and the devil take the blacks, and the French are almost the same, while the British officers are a trifle more merciful."

"But you Americans! Well, yonder is an example, for, rather than leave four men to drown, yonder brig's captain loses this vessel now, but hopes to catch her," and Captain Corti laughed as though the idea amused him, that a man could be human.

In a moment after he continued, as he found Basil a good listener:

"Now, Sanchez, whom you hanged, you know, had a strange adventure when he was captain of a slaver some years ago."

"He had a lieutenant who spoke the African tongue perfectly, and when he was running out he was chased by a Spanish cruiser."

"He saw that he would be captured, for the wind was light, and dying out, and he knew that the Spaniards would attack in their boats when night came on."

"Then a bright idea struck Sanchez."

"He was out of range of the Spaniards guns, and he was not armed, except with small-arms."

"So he told his officer to tell the blacks that the Spaniards would take them and burn them,

while, if they fought for the vessel, they should all be taken back to their homes.

"Of course they believed this, and that night, when the Spaniards boarded in their half-dozen boats, a half-thousand howling blacks set upon them with clubs and what they had been armed with, and hurled the amazed and startled boarders into the sea.

"The Spaniards were only too glad to swim out of reach, those who were not killed, and did not drown, and getting into their boats row back to their vessel completely panic-stricken."

"And the blacks?" asked Basil.

"Oh! they were told that a storm was coming up, and if they did not go below, just as they had been, the vessel would sink, and they obeyed."

"A storm did come, Sanchez escaped, and after a long voyage, he reached Trinidad, and landed half a hundred emaciated wretches, all that were left of his six hundred, for they had died heart-broken, at the trick played on them."

"It broke Sanchez, for his vessel was an old one, and he had to go as mate with me."

"Now he has gone below to Satan his master," and Señor Corti laughed, as though highly amused.

After a moment he added:

"If we make a rapid and successful run of it, Señor Basil, and arrive with three-fourths of our cargo in good condition, after one more voyage that pays well, I shall be rich enough to retire from the business and return to Spain."

"It is unknown, then, by your friends that you are a slaver?" suggested Basil.

"My dear señor, I have my little romance, for I loved a beautiful girl, and though my blood was as blue as any in Spain, I was poor, and her parents preferred a young officer who was rich as their daughter's husband."

"The maiden, however, loved me, and we arranged to fly together, when I was kidnapped one night near my home, carried off by force, and I found myself an Algerine corsair."

"I learned enough from her *rais** to understand that my rival, the rich Spanish naval officer had hired a party to seize me and give me to the corsair."

"Well, I was sold into slavery, and for two years I was the slave of a desert prince, suffering untold tortures."

"Those two years, Señor Basil, made me bitter against all the world, and I would have died but that I grew revengeful and swore to live to bring retribution upon the man who had so wronged me."

"I became wicked too, from my constant sufferings, and one night, in cold blood, I murdered my desert master, seized his two best camels, which I had all ready for escape, and fled."

"I was followed doubtless, but I never saw my pursuers, and in time I reached the coast."

"I wandered there for several days, my gaze upon the sea day and night, and at last I spied a sail one morning."

"A vessel lay off the shore becalmed."

"She was a mile away, but I bade my good camels good-bye, set them adrift to go their own way, and took to the sea."

"I made the swim in safety, and found myself upon a slaver, and Señor Sanchez, whom you hanged, was captain of the craft."

"That is why I did not give the order to hang him, and put up with what I did from him."

"Well, I went before the mast, and thus learned the duties of a seaman, which well fitted me to become a commander."

"We landed on the South Carolina Coast with our cargo, and soon after were wrecked among the Bahamas and many of the crew lost."

"I drifted about for awhile, shipping on vessels bound from port to port, and at last became mate of a vessel."

"I turned her into a slaver, when the captain died at sea of fever, and made a successful run to Fernando Po and got a cargo of slaves from the Portuguese traders."

"Then I built this vessel to suit myself, and am on the highway to fortune, for I have a snug sum saved up in Havana, and with another successful voyage after this will be an immensely rich man."

"Then I shall return to Spain, as I said, kill my rival in a duel and marry his widow."

"That shall be my revenge, Señor Basil," and the black eyes of Captain Corti fairly blazed with hatred as he uttered the words.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FATEFUL VOYAGE.

ONE pleasant afternoon, some two years after the flight of the Sea Venus from the coast of Africa pursued by the American brig-of-war, there were two vessels sailing swiftly over the waters only a dozen leagues from the coast of Cuba.

The leading vessel was none other than the slaver, Sea Venus, and she was using every effort to escape from a Spanish cruiser that was in hot pursuit.

Like any other man who finds it hard to break off from an evil life, Captain Corti had not kept his promise made two years before and done so.

*Captain.

He had made half a dozen successful voyages to the African Coast, and fortune seemed to smile upon his wicked life, as he had been successful each time in bringing a cargo of unfortunate blacks to Cuba.

He had amassed a vast fortune, and each time was wont to say that it would be his last cruise, and that he would turn over his vessel to Basil Barton, who still remained his mate.

On this last voyage, however, sickness had broken out among his crew, who were the men who had shipped when Basil did and still clung to the fortunes of the Spanish slaver.

The fever had spread from the crew to the blacks cooped up below, and their sufferings were horrible.

A dozen of the crew died and were thrown overboard, and then each day following a score of blacks would die and be tossed into the sea.

Storms beset the slaver also, and it was the most fearful voyage which any one on board had ever known or heard of in the history of the slave trade.

But at last the fever wore itself out, clear skies and fresh breezes came, and the Island of Cuba was but a few days' sail away.

But another danger then threatened the little vessel, as a fleet Spanish cruiser was sighted at dawn and gave chase.

All day the chase lasted, and her fire, for she was within range, killed several of the crew, damaged the rigging and hull and killed many a poor black in the crowded hold where they were huddled together in mortal terror and despair.

Had not the elements and night come to the rescue of the daring but wicked man, the fate of Captain Corti and his crew would have been quickly sealed.

But a storm swept over the sea, night fell, and in the darkness the Sea Venus eluded her pursuer, and two hours after was landing her cargo of slaves upon the Cuban Coast.

An agent was there to receive them, the slaver received his draft on Havana for the two hundred unfortunates, all that remained of six hundred that had been shipped on the African Coast, and then he returned on board his vessel.

As he entered his cabin he called to Basil to follow him.

The face of the Spaniard, Basil noted, was clouded, and he expected bad news.

"Be seated, señor."

The American dropped into a chair near him.

"How many in crew have we, Señor Basil?"

"Just twenty-one men, Captain Corti, and some of these are unfit for service, not having fully recovered from the effects of the fever."

"And the schooner is in very bad shape?"

"Yes, señor, the carpenter reports the water rising in her hold quite rapidly."

"Well, señor, we will leave her, and in her place I shall have another vessel built for you, as an appreciation of your valuable services to me."

"I am amply able, Captain Corti, to build a vessel, as I have saved up quite a snug fortune."

"No, I desire to make you a present of a craft fully equipped and armed, for I am a very rich man, Señor Basil, a very rich man."

"I do not doubt it, Captain Corti."

"It is true that I have lost the value of some four hundred slaves on this last voyage, but I can afford it."

"But I wish you to go with me to Havana, when I will transfer my riches to the United States, and while there order your vessel for you, such an one as you may desire."

"I wish you then, while she is being built, to accompany me to Spain and visit me, while there is a special service I wish you to perform for me after arrival there."

"You are very kind, Señor Corti, have ever been most kind to me, and I will do as you wish with pleasure."

"I have not liked the slave trade, I frankly admit, for it seems cowardly; but I have stuck to it on your account, and now, as you intend to retire, I shall give it up."

"Ah! and the new schooner?"

"I shall make a pirate craft of her, I guess," was the cool response of Basil Barton.

"Ah! ever reckless, my dear Señor Basil; but you will make a dashing free rover, my word for it, and I wish you every success."

"I will watch your career with interest and keep your secret faithfully."

"But now to our crew."

"Well, sir?"

"I wish to give them a little blow-out, so shall invite them into the cabin to have wine with me."

"Then I will tell them that I shall let the schooner go, as she is about useless and I dare not put to sea in her."

"And you I wish, Señor Basil, to get your traps together, go ashore in the gig, rowing yourself, and await me at the Vandela Plantation, whose owner you visited with me upon our last voyage."

"I will do so, señor."

"And go at once, Señor Basil, for I will join you there within the hour."

"But bid the men visit me here in the cabin as you go on deck on your way ashore."

Basil bowed and departed.

He felt that the Spaniard was up to some deep game, but just what he could not make out.

He hastily gathered his traps together and went on deck.

Ordering the gig alongside and the men to go to the cabin, Basil went ashore.

The Vandela Plantation was near the shore of the little bay in which the Sea Venus was bidding, and the mansion was but half a mile away.

Señor Vandela was an old bachelor dwelling there alone, excepting several old slaves, and his plantation was never cultivated.

Secretly he was the agent of the slavers, and yet he was not suspected of being such by his nearest neighbors.

While Basil was making his way to the Vandela Plantation wondering what Captain Corti was intending to do in the way of devilry, that worthy was on board his vessel planning a most diabolical plot, the nature of which the next chapter will make known.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOOMED TO DEATH.

AFTER the departure of the young American mate from the Sea Venus, the crew, obeying the order given them, began to assemble in the cabin of the slaver.

Captain Corti sat there by the table, the cabin-lamp shining full upon his handsome face, cruel though it was in expression, and he greeted the men pleasantly as they entered.

"Come in, lads, come in, for this is our last night together," he said.

The men were a hard lot.

Nearly all of them had served with him for years, and every sensibility of their manhood had been blunted by the cruelties they had perpetrated upon the defenseless negro captives and the horrors they had witnessed.

There was not one among the lot who had a heart that could be moved by any anguish or sorrow.

They were callous to the bone.

But they were good sailors, if bad men, and they admired their dashing commander and liked him, for he had given them bounteously from his ill-gotten gains.

"Well, men, I wish to say to you that you are to make your way to Havana, and report to me there at the Punta Tavern, for I will be there."

"You wisely allowed me to bank a part of your pay for you, and I will have a handsome sum to pay each one of you."

"I will be there for a month, as I intend to look about for a plantation, for I shall turn planter, and I will be ever glad to see any of the lads there who have served me so faithfully."

"Señor Basil has gone ashore to the Vandela Plantation, and there I am to join him, while you, Norcross, will act as captain, and run the Sea Venus to the Isle of Pines, where a lugger will await you to carry you to Havana, as I dare not take the schooner into that port."

"Now, lads, I have set out some of my best wines here, as you see, with which to drink your health and fortune, so fill up."

Never before had the crew seen their captain in such an excellent humor, and they hastily obeyed, delighted at the chance to "fill up."

The goblets were quickly filled and emptied, the slaver captain urging the men to drink as deep as they wished, and it was not long before the effects became evident.

The men grew boisterous, some laughed and joked their captain, others sang merrily, and a few let what grievances they had against their fellows crop out, for liquor will bring out a man's true nature.

Captain Corti sat still, smiling and seeming to enjoy the scene.

But it did not last long, as the men had imbibed too freely, and they were soon so deeply under the influence as to become stupid.

One or two in quarrelsome humor, shot a fellow whom they had a grudge against, another drove a knife into the back of Norcross, and all seemed to enjoy the cruel tragedies, while Captain Corti never moved from his chair, and, making no effort to stay the murderous hands, looked smilingly on.

At last one man fell in his tracks, completely overcome.

Another soon sunk down to sleep, and it was but a short while before all were stretched about the cabin floor, as motionless as the two men who had been slain.

"Ah!" said Captain Corti, and he rose quickly and glanced down upon the scene.

"Better so," he added, and then he went upon deck.

Going forward he entered the forecastle hatch and was gone for quite a while.

Then he returned and secured the hatch firmly.

The amidships hatch was also fastened down, and walking aft the slaver once more entered the cabin.

"They sleep well," he said, as a sneer curled his lips.

Then he gathered some papers from his private desk, and collecting his various traps returned to the deck.

There was a boat alongside, fast by the painter to the starboard gangway.

Into this the slaver captain put his traps, and then went back to the cabin companionway.

"Farewell, lads," he said in the same sneering tone, and then the companionway was firmly closed.

Back to the boat he went, descended into it, cast off, and seizing the oars pulled a ship's-length away.

"She feels it," he muttered, as he saw the schooner moving.

Watching her closely he saw that she was rapidly getting lower in the water.

"She is going down well," he observed in his quiet way.

Still watching her he saw the water reach her scuppers, then flow upon her decks, and reeling, trembling she seemed to be fighting for life, until, with a mighty plunge she sunk beneath the waters.

The waves came rushing toward his boat, causing it to dance about, and he pulled hard at the oars to prevent being drawn into the foaming vortex.

"I was too near," he said.

He shuddered as he spoke, at his escape, and then glanced over the moonlit waters.

Not a vestige of the beautiful but ill-fated craft was visible.

"The bay is deep enough to hide her until eternity.

"I have done well."

So saying he pulled leisurely for the shore.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES."

BASIL BARTON was having a glass of wine and a little supper with Señor Vandela, the old Cuban, when Captain Corti entered the half-tumbled down mansion.

Señor Vandela had already ordered a chair and plate for his expected guest, and the latter sat down and dashed off a glass of wine with evident relish.

"Señor Basil, I decided to send the schooner at once to the Isle of Pines, so saw her set sail before I left the shore," said Captain Corti.

Basil simply bowed, making no reply.

"And as soon as we have had some supper, if Señor Vandela will let his man drive us on our way, I shall be thankful."

"All that my poor house possesses, señor, you can command."

"I will at once order Pedro to get the horses ready," and Señor Vandela called to a slave and ordered the *rolante* brought to the door with all haste.

Soon after the Spaniard and Basil bade the old Cuban *adios* and drove away, a slave going as driver, to bring the *rolante* back.

Captain Corti seemed disinclined to talk, and leaning back on the ragged cushions of the vehicle appeared to be asleep.

But Basil remained awake and enjoyed the drive by night.

The horses were good ones and Pedro was a good driver, so they went along at a rapid pace.

Shortly after dawn Captain Corti awoke, just as a country inn became visible ahead.

Here breakfast was obtained, and a fresh team, Pedro being sent back with a handsome souvenir in gold for his services.

Late in the afternoon the two slavers reached Havana, having changed horses several times and driven rapidly.

They drove at once to the Punta Tavern, a place well known to Captain Corti, and they were soon resting in large, well furnished rooms that communicated.

"They know you here, señor," said Basil, referring to the greeting which the landlord had given the slaver captain.

"As Don Andreu Cortez, a Spanish planter in Cuba only, Señor Basil," was the reply.

"You certainly cover up your tracks well."

Captain Corti laughed lightly.

"Well, it is a life of peril you lead, and you need to."

"My dear señor, even our friend Señor Vandela does not know me."

"Indeed, señor?"

"He knows me as Captain Corti, a slaver, and he is the agent for men in Havana who buy the slaves."

"Vandela pays me by draft, as you saw, upon the banks in Havana, and I draw the money here."

"I have other funds in the banks, and am supposed to be a wealthy Spaniard, planting in Cuba somewhere, and other of the West India Islands."

"Now let me cut off my beard and hair, change my attire and who would know me?"

"I confess it would make a complete metamorphosis in you, señor."

"Now the three servants you saw at Señor Vandela's, and whom you supposed to be an old negro and two men, are the wife and sons of the Cuban, who is not as old as he professes to be, or his white wig shows."

"You surprise me, señor."

"His wife and sons are blackened up, by a peculiar preparation which he invented, and wear wool wigs, for he would not dare trust negroes in the perilous life he leads there as agent for slavers."

"He professes to be an eccentric old planter, who has lost his money and allows his place to go to ruin; but, when he has made a fortune to suit his avaricious ideas, he will move away and enjoy his riches elsewhere."

"Ah, señor, this slave trade has many peculiar features in it, for I could tell you that prominent merchants in Havana here, are owners of some of the vessels and act secretly through agents."

"Well, señor, you have been fortunate in escaping recognition thus far; but you might some day meet one of your old crew who would recognize you."

"Dead men tell no tales," señor, is an old saying and a truthful one," was the laconic response.

"But your crew are not dead."

The Spaniard laughed.

"Do you mean that I shall believe that they are?"

"Yes, señor."

"But how, when?"

"My dear Señor Basil, my crew, if any one could, would recognize me."

"Now they were a bad lot, faithful when it was their interest to be so, treacherous as snakes otherwise."

"Now I have too much at stake, Señor Basil, to risk recognition, and I tell you frankly you are the only man I trust and who knows me as I am."

"After a short stay in Havana we sail for the United States, order your vessel, then go to Spain, and I will show you how a Spanish Don can live who has the wealth to back up his luxurious inclinations."

"After a visit with me, as long as you desire to remain, and you have rendered me a certain service, you may go your way and I shall go mine, each keeping the other's secret."

"But, by the way, Señor Basil, I am now Don Andrea Do Costa, for such is my real name."

"I shall so call you, Don Andrea Do Costa."

"And you are Señor Basila Bartona, a Cuban planter, for your Spanish accent is perfect, amigo."

Basil bowed and then said, thoughtfully:

"The name suits me, señor, and it is but adding a letter to my own."

"But let me ask you about the crew of the Sea Venus?"

"They are at the bottom of the sea, Señor Basila."

"Dead?"

"Every one of them."

"But how?"

"Well, the schooner was in bad condition, and I wished to have the men stick to their ship."

"The Venus was sinking slowly, and so I gave the crew a treat."

"I feasted them on the best wine I had on board and made them happy."

"Some showed their ugly nature and quarreled, and one was shot to death and another stabbed to the heart."

"But I let them have their fun, for it was their last."

"At last the drug I had put in their wine took effect and they laid down upon the cabin floor to sleep."

"It was their last sleep, Señor Basila, for I fastened them in the cabin, went below, bored holes into the hull and then came on deck and took to my boat."

"You scuttled the schooner?"

"I did, señor."

"And all on board went down in her, señor?"

"Not one escaped, I pledge you my word."

"This was horrible," said the amazed American.

"Dead men tell no tales, señor," was the smiling response of the Spaniard.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DON RETURNS.

A CERTAIN town on the coast of Spain was suddenly awakened from its lazy attitude one day, some six months after the scuttling of the Sea Venus by her commander, with her wicked crew on board, by having an important personage appear in its midst.

A grand estate, princely in its magnificence, lordly in its surroundings, had been offered for sale, as its owner had gambled away his inheritance and then taken his own life.

The grand old castle, for it was nothing more, was the admiration of the townspeople, and it was said that its halls and numerous chambers had cost a fortune to furnish.

The park surrounding it boasted of two-score acres, there were vast flower-gardens, fountains and arbors inviting to a cool retreat.

Then, the spacious stables were filled with the finest horses and equipages, and a score of servants were in attendance.

When he found that he had gotten to the end of his tether, the owner had determined not to live a poor man.

He owed debts, and the sale of the estate would no more than pay them.

So he calmly wrote his will that his estate should be sold to the highest bidder for cash, his creditors should be paid in full and the balance should go to a grand funeral and monument for himself.

Having done this he promptly went out of existence by his own hand.

Just at this time there was an agent looking around for the purchase of an estate.

On the Castle just suited him, and he paid cash for it, retaining the servants and all just as the suicide had left it, in perfect order, and the coming of the personage for whom he had made the purchase was the cause of excitement in the town.

It was a great thing to have a new owner for "The Castle," as the place was called, and one who could pay down in cash the very handsome sum which it had brought.

It was the fifth day after the death of the suicide, who had thoughtfully taken his life in a tavern, and not at his elegant home, and the day of the funeral that the new master arrived at the town.

He instantly decided to attend the funeral of the late master of the estate, and did so, driving in grand style to the grave, accompanied by his agent and a friend who had come as his guest for awhile, it was said.

The whole town turned out for the funeral, as much for respect of a man who had paid his creditors before killing himself, as from curiosity to see the new master of the castle.

Every creditor was there, and he had already been paid by the very prompt executors of the suicide's will.

The place of honor was, by common consent, given to the stranger, who was looked upon as "chief mourner."

He bore the honor gracefully, and seemed not to care a whit for the gaze of the populace.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered, handsome man, with a beardless face, hair cut short and eyes that were most penetrating, seeming to read the thoughts of the one upon whom they were turned.

His agent sat upon the front seat of his carriage, obsequious and smiling, in spite of the funeral, as was proper in a man who represented one worth a fabulous sum, as it was stated the new owner of the castle certainly was.

Upon the right hand of the stranger sat his friend and guest, a very handsome, dashing-looking personage, and whom the ladies were fairly fascinated with.

Also attending the funeral was a party of naval and army officers of Spain, for the suicide had always been a great favorite with the wearers of swords, brass buttons and gold lace.

In one carriage was the captain of a vessel-of-war then in the port, and in fact stationed there.

He was a man of middle age, stern-faced and somewhat cruel-looking, and his officers and crew feared him as they did Satan.

But he was very rich, lived in grand style in an elegant home not far from the castle, and was a lion in the town, being both feared and yet sought after.

By his side sat a woman of exquisite beauty. She was the wife of the naval captain, and nearly a score of years his junior.

Very beautiful, very fascinating, she was loved by all who knew her, and no one could gaze into her sad face and not admire her.

It was said by those who knew that she had married a rich man she did not love and had given up a poor one whom she did love, and all for the sake of her parents who had urged the sacrifice.

Her husband, a man of wealth and high rank in the navy, was yet not a hero in her eyes, so said those who knew something of the inner life of the two.

Yet she was a true wife, even though he was stern, almost cruel to her, and yet in her heart she had the grave of a buried love.

Immediately behind the carriage of the new master of the castle, which was next to the hearse by common consent, came that of the naval captain.

Both the captain and his beautiful wife felt some curiosity to see the stranger, and yet they had no opportunity to do so, yet must when the grave was reached.

Out of the town to the "City of the Dead" the funeral cortège wound its way, and at last halted near the grave.

The priests descended from their carriages, the pall-bearers bore the very elegant coffin from the hearse, heads were uncovered and the procession went on foot to the last resting-place of the suicide.

The stranger and his guest still led the way, and were given the place of honor on the right of the priests, who had taken their stand at the head of the grave.

The captain and his bride moved forward and took their position to the left of the priests at the other side of the grave.

They were just opposite to the stranger and his guest.

Then the army and navy officers, the friends of the suicide, and those who had been his creditors and were made happy in his death ranged

themselves about with the *ot pollo* encircling all.

The voices of the priests chanting the funeral ceremonies arose on the air, and all else were silent, with heads bowed, eyes fixed upon the coffin of the suicide and the new master of the castle, for curiosity was about equally divided between the man who was going from their midst and the one who was coming to dwell among them.

Bending slightly toward his guest the master of the castle said, in a low tone:

"Señor Basila, the man across this open grave is Captain Don Delorme, the man who robbed me of my bride ten years ago.

"The lady on his arm is the one he robbed me of."

Perhaps his low words caught the ear of the Señora Delorme, for she raised her eyes from the grave, met full those of Andrea De Costa, and with a cry fell in a swoon at the feet of her husband.

CHAPTER XXV.

NEMESIS.

ALL who heard the cry of the Señora Delorme, all who saw her fall, gave their deepest sympathy.

It was supposed that the impressive scene overcame her, for no one had seen her meet the gaze of the new master of The Castle.

She had swooned, that was certain, and her husband in alarm and amazement bore her away to her carriage.

He did not see the face of the man who was his rival.

The priests went on with their chanting.

Their duty was to the dead, not the living just then.

The crowd did not connect the swooning of the señora with the presence of Don Andrea De Costa.

They did not know that for years she had mourned over the grave of Luried love in her heart.

They did not know that she suddenly saw, out of that grave, spring the face and form of the one she had so madly loved.

Day and night the face of Andrea De Costa had been in her thoughts.

He had gone from her years before, when she had been forced to marry Captain, then Lieutenant Delorme, the distinguished and rich naval officer.

It had been said that De Costa had taken his own life in his despair.

It was said that he had been killed by those who had sought to rob him.

What his fate had been none knew.

His home, and Isabel's, the maiden he loved, had been in a distant place.

She had mysteriously disappeared, she had married the Señor Delorme, and her place of abode had been in the nearest town to which her husband's vessel was stationed.

But, believing him dead, Andrea De Costa had suddenly appeared before her in the flesh.

She could not forget that face.

Even in the glance she had of it, she saw that time had made changes upon it, the gray threads were stealing into his black hair, the sunny smile ever upon his mouth and in his eyes had been transformed into a siuister expression, and a sternness that was cruel, it seemed.

And yet it was the same face she had loved ten long years before.

He saw that she had grown still more beautiful.

Her eyes were filled with touching sadness, and the look hovering about her exquisite mouth proved that she had suffered.

But yet it was the face, the graceful form he had loved in the long ago.

And across an open grave they met.

It seemed ominous. Don Andrea De Costa meant that it should be so.

She fainted, and he smiled.

"She loves me yet," he almost hissed forth.

Away from the grave Captain Delorme bore his fainting wife.

Still at the grave remained Andrea De Costa and his guest, Señor Basila Bartona.

The chanting of the Spanish priests ended, the suicide was buried, and the large attendance turned their faces back toward the town.

The dead attended to, the living were looked after, and all eyes were upon the two strangers.

They certainly were splendid-looking men and won universal admiration.

The agent saw the furor they created, and imagined himself the hero for bringing the Don to the town, forgetting that he had received a letter, inclosing a draft, with orders to at once purchase the finest home in the place for him.

Back to the castle drove the Don and his guest.

The servants bent obsequiously before them, and the two friends adjourned to the beautiful pleasure-gardens for a walk and a talk.

"You saw her, Señor Basila?" said the Don, as he threw himself into an easy-chair in an arbor and lighted a cigar.

"I did, Don Andrea."

"And your opinion of her?"

"She is superbly beautiful, and at the same time has a face to love as well as admire."

"A fitting compliment, and truthful."

"You saw him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Your opinion of him?"

"A dangerous man when he is thwarted, selfish, cruel, and one who would be a villain if he had been born to different luck."

"You read human nature as an open book, my dear Señor Basila."

"Now what think you of my home?"

"Elegant beyond compare."

"I am not known here."

"So it seemed, as you were recognized by the lady only."

"She knew me the moment our eyes met."

"Yes, I saw that, for my eyes were upon her when she looked at you."

"She turned white."

"Her face became livid, she seemed trying to speak, and then she uttered that cry and swooned."

"I hope the shock will not be too much for her."

"Oh, no; she will come round all right."

"But now to meet Captain Delorme."

"The army and naval officers with the aristocratic citizens will doubtless call upon you."

"Oh, yes."

"And Captain Delorme will call."

"He will be sure to."

"Then, Don?"

"I shall surprise him by my presence even more than I did his wife."

"You will betray him as having caused you to be kidnapped just before you intended to fly with the Señorita Isabel and make her your wife?"

"Not at once, but I shall force him to meet me, and the service I have to ask of you is that you will be my second."

"Willingly."

"I shall kill him, and then I shall marry his wife."

"But will she become the wife of the man who has slain her husband, even though she loves you?"

"I think so."

"Better let me quarrel with him, kill him, and then you marry his widow."

"I thank you, my dear Basila, but that would not be my full revenge."

"I shall kill him, and then make her my wife."

"She will naturally get his fortune, which is large, and I shall have pleasure in living upon it, along with what I possess."

"I shall be a very happy man, Señor Basila Bartona, in my revenge."

After a longer conversation together the two friends, so strangely met, so strangely bonded together, went to the mansion to dinner.

The silver service and china were superb, the edibles were all that heart could desire and the wine was like nectar.

And they enjoyed their luxury with seemingly no thought to the cruel lives they had led, the graves they had dug for others on sea and land, and that for every dollar of gold they had gained tears of deathlike anguish had been shed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RETRIBUTION.

FOR fully an hour did Señora Delorme lie in the deep swoon into which she had fallen at the grave.

Her husband, who admired her, and loved her in his selfish way, carried her at once to his home.

A physician was sent for, and at last, when all began to fear she would not rally, she opened her eyes.

She shuddered as she met the gaze of her husband.

Then she glanced about her, in a slow, reasoning way, and asked, faintly:

"Tell me just what happened."

"The ceremony at the grave was so impressive, it affected you beyond control, señora," said the physician.

Then he told the captain that his wife was again herself and would need no further care, so took his departure.

"Well, señora, you made a fool of yourself to-day, that is certain."

It was the remark of Captain Delorme, who entered the chamber of his wife after the departure of the physician, and dismissed the servants about their business.

"It seems that I did," was the low reply.

"I saw nothing in the monotonous chanting of those priests to affect one."

"You saw not what I saw."

"He was a suicide, yes, and—"

"That was not the reason."

"There is a reason, then?"

"Yes."

"Why you fainted?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"I care not to tell you."

"You must."

"I decline, señora."

"But you shall."

"Give me a few days, at least."

"I will give you two days."

"In that time you may yourself discover the cause."

"Your words mystify me, señora."

"I am sure that a mystery of long standing is now about to be cleared up, Señor Don Captain Delorme."

"I believe your brain is turned."

"Oh, no, I am perfectly sane, señor."

"Well, drop the subject until you are better, and then I shall expect to learn the cause."

"But I wish to ask you if I should not at once call upon this rich stranger who has come into our midst?"

"I hear he is worth millions."

"Indeed."

"Yes, and I wish to be among the first to pay my respects, as he will doubtless be a pleasant person to know."

"Do you know aught of him?"

"Not even his name."

"I had not heard it either, and I was surprised to see him at the funeral."

"It was a courtesy upon his part that proved him the gentleman; but before I could get a look at him you swooned away, so I do not know even what he looks like."

"I do," was the meaning response of the beautiful woman.

"You managed to see him then?"

"Yes, señor."

"Describe him."

"A tall, well-formed man, with a very handsome face, which indicated that he was one who had suffered, I thought, for I saw it well in the glance I had of it."

"He was dressed richly and in perfect taste, and in fact reminded me of one long dead."

"Who?"

"Don Andrea De Costa."

The Spaniard started at her words, and while his face grew black as a thunder-cloud he said fiercely:

"Have I not commanded you never to mention the name of that man to me?"

"Yes."

"And you dare to disobey me?"

"You asked me to describe this stranger."

"I shall not like him if he looks like that hated man."

"Don't be prejudiced before you see him!"

The mention of the name of Andrea De Costa served to affect the Spaniard strangely.

His face still remained pale, his brow still wore the thunder-cloud look that had come upon it.

Suddenly, without another word he turned and left the room.

As he closed the door he heard his wife's voice break out in a ringing laugh.

He had never heard her laugh like that before.

"Maldito! she is mad I fear me," he muttered as he passed rapidly on to his own rooms. Once there he began to pace to and fro.

"Curses! why did she not let that name rest?"

"It has completely upset me."

"I have tried to forget it, tried to bury all remembrance of that man, and of my deed."

"I had hoped that she had forgotten him."

"But she has not."

"Well, if that stranger looks like Andrea De Costa, I shall never care to look him in the face."

"He will be a constant reminder of my crime, and the retribution upon me will be most fearful."

"I hope that was only a random shot of Isabel's."

"But if it is true, if he does look like that man, then I shall at once apply for orders to go elsewhere, for I have haunting memories enough without a reminder of the face of Andrea De Costa ever before me."

"Bah! she is mistaken; but I will call upon him to-morrow, and go alone."

"Then I will see for myself."

and bowed low to conceal his emotion, while he thought:

"A startling resemblance indeed."

"Señor Don Delorme, I am somewhat surprised that you should be the first to welcome Don Andrea De Costa back to Spain."

The words fell in low, distinct tones from the lips of the slaver captain.

"It is he! *Caramba!*"

It was all that Captain Delorme could utter for the moment.

He stood, swaying as though foolish with wine, his face ghastly, his eyes staring, while before him, calm, smiling and triumphant, was Andrea De Costa, the man whom he had believed dead, as he had hired men to kill him.

At one side of De Costa stood Basila Bartona, as he then called himself, also calm and rather enjoying the situation.

By a mighty effort Señor Delorme gained control of himself, and then said, in a voice that was husky with passion and dread commingled:

"I came hither to welcome one who had come as a stranger in our midst."

"Had I known that it was you, Don Andrea De Costa, I would never have crossed the threshold of your house."

"I bid you *adios*."

"One moment, Señor Don Captain Delorme."

The naval officer hesitated.

"I am Don Andrea De Costa, the once poor lover of Señorita Isabel Henriquez."

"You robbed me of my bride, you hired assassins to kill me, and after long years I return, rich, powerful, unmarried and revengeful."

"That your wife loves me, her swooning at the grave when she met my eyes, proves."

"I am come, Señor Don Delorme, to kill you and to marry your widow."

"We met across an open grave."

"It was an ominous meeting."

"This gentleman is my friend, my guest, Señor Basila Bartona, and he will arrange with any friend of yours who may seek him as your representative."

"Adios, Señor Don Captain Delorme, until our next meeting, over an open grave."

The Spanish officer had not moved during these words of the man he had wronged.

He seemed incapable of speaking a word.

When at last Don Andrea De Costa ceased and bowed with mock respect, he walked slowly from the room, entered his carriage and was driven to his home.

His wife was seated by an open window overlooking the garden.

Her face was thoughtful, sad, worried.

She glanced up at his coming, and she saw that something had happened.

He looked years older, haggard and his expression was as fierce as a mad beast's.

She seemed to feel that he knew all before he spoke, though she had not known of his early visit to the new master of The Castle.

"I have called upon the master of the castle, señora," he said humbly, as he stood before her.

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"How do you like him?"

"I hate him."

"He is not the gentleman you expected to find?"

"No."

"His money will not make him popular with your set, then?"

"No."

"Do you not know who he is?"

"I have heard that he bears a name which you command me never to utter."

"Andrea De Costa?"

"Yes."

"It is he."

"I thought he was dead."

"So supposed I, after his mysterious disappearance."

"But he has come back, and is rich."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; and it was your recognition of him at the grave yesterday that caused you to faint."

"I confess it."

"You love him yet?"

"Was it not enough to shock me to behold one I had loved in my girlhood, whom I told you I would never forget, though your wife, one whom I believed dead suddenly appear before me?"

"I came not here to answer your questions."

"Your old lover, no longer poor, but rich and powerful, has returned."

"This world is not large enough for us both, living, so one must die."

"I am fond of life, and I am determined that he shall be the one."

Without another word he left the room, while from the lips of his beautiful wife came the prayer: "Holy Mother, protect him!" in behalf of her husband—or her lover?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN AFFAIR OF HONOR.

"Matters are shaping themselves, Señor Basila, just to suit me," said Don Andrea De Costa, as he and his guest sat together after dinner.

and the day after Captain Delorme's visit to the castle.

"He will doubtless send his second to you," observed Basila.

"Yes, for he is a man of undoubted courage, and as I have informed him of my intentions he will be most anxious to get rid of me."

"And the weapons?"

"I have no choice, my dear Basila."

"And Captain Delorme—do you know aught of his prowess with blade or pistol?"

"It seems to me that I remember him as holding the name of a dead-shot and perfect swordsman, while he has killed two men in duels, I learn."

"Well, I feel no dread of your skill, señor."

"Nor I, and I assure you that my cause is a just one."

"I was a good man, Basila, when I was young, and I would have lived an honorable life."

"There was but one woman in the world to me, and she was Isabel."

"She could have made me all that it was possible for me to become as an honorable man."

"He plotted against my life, as I have told you, and all I suffered made me what I am."

"I have been as wicked as man can be in this world, I guess; but when my revenge is consummated, when that man is in his grave, I will be different."

"When Isabel becomes my wife, I will be ennobled, and my riches, gained by sin, shall go to those who are in need."

"For her sake my past life shall be forgotten, I will atone for my crimes, and she shall know me only as one who has a good heart and loves her—Ah! here comes a *volante*, and I suppose it is Captain Delorme's friend, for I see brass buttons and gold lace on the visitor."

Don Andrea was not wrong, for the visitor did come from Captain Delorme.

He was an army officer, a colonel of lancers, and was noted for his affairs of honor.

He dressed like an exquisite, prided himself upon his good looks, and was rather proud of the thought that he had half a dozen lives on his hands, all taken at the muzzle of a pistol or point of a sword on the dueling-field.

His card was sent in and upon it Basila read:

"ENDEROS QUITELLA,

"Colonel of Lancers."

"He asked for the Señor Basila Bartona, señor," said the servant, who brought the card in on a silver salver.

Basila arose and went into the parlor.

The colonel greeted him with a smile.

The greatest pleasure on earth to him was being the principal in a duel.

The next greatest enjoyment was in acting as second for a friend.

So he was in great humor.

He quickly made known why he had come, and the preliminaries were speedily arranged for a meeting.

The colonel was delighted with Basila, and readily accepted his invitation to accompany him to the dining *salon* for a glass of wine.

Basila presented him to Don Andrea, who bade him welcome, and the colonel was pleased with the Don.

He left in thorough good-humor, and his parting remark was significant:

"I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again very soon, señors."

"Well, Don, I arranged for swords as weapons, the place a spot suggested by the colonel, and time at sunset to-day," said Basila, when they were again alone.

"It suits me perfectly, my dear Señor Basila, and I shall enjoy a good night's rest, after killing Don Delorme," was the quiet response.

Two hours after, the Don and his guest drove away from the mansion.

Their destination was a point on the coast below the town.

They reached the spot, to which the coachman had been directed, and found that they were first upon the field.

But a boat was seen approaching, and in it, besides the oarsmen, were several officers.

The footman, at an order from Señor Basila, took a case from the carriage, and carried it to a spot beneath the trees near by.

Then the boat had landed, and three officers approached.

Captain Delorme was in undress naval uniform, but Colonel Enderos Quitella had rigged himself out in full-dress regiments for the affair.

The third of the party was the surgeon of the captain's ship.

The officers saluted as they approached, and Don Andrea and Basila bowed, the former with a smile upon his face.

Don Delorme was in grim humor, to judge by his face.

He knew that he was to meet a man who would be inclined toward him, and not just cause to be.

But the Spanish naval officer was aware of the fact that he had never met his superior with a sword, and in a truly chivalrous mood disarmed the famous colonel of lancers, who made up his mind that he would never quarrel with the captain.

"It cannot be that two men live who are my superiors with a blade, so Delorme will kill him," he had said to himself, on the way to the field.

In his quiet way Señor Basila made his preparations for the meeting.

The swords were taken out, and, after testing them, Colonel Quitella decided that they were even superior to his magnificent weapons, and concluded that the duel should be fought with them.

"They are beyond compare, Señor Basila Bartona, beyond compare."

"Have they ever been baptized?" he said, with enthusiasm.

"Do you mean used in mortal combat, Señor Colonel?"

"Yes, señor."

"They have both been dyed with human blood, Señor Colonel."

"Take your choice, please."

There was no choice and the colonel selected one at random.

Then the two men were placed in position.

"This is to be a duel to the death, as I understand it, señors, though I know not the cause of your quarrel," said Colonel Quitella.

"It is to be a duel to the death, Señor Colonel," responded Basila.

Then the swords crossed and the duel was begun.

Both handled a weapon with a skill that was remarkable, and the colonel was wild with admiration.

Don Delorme was as fierce as a tiger in his thrusts and lunges, while he glared savagely at his enemy.

Don Andrea was as cool as an icicle, and wore on his face a wicked smile.

Long and furious the combat waged, first one and then the other giving ground, and neither yet showing that he was overmatched.

At length, as if by common consent, the swords were lowered and the two men stood at rest.

But only for a few moments, for Don Andrea raised his blade again as a signal for the fight to be resumed.

He fought even more coolly than before, while Captain Delorme seemed to be even more savage in his attacks.

Presently the sword-point of the slaver touched the shoulder of his enemy, drawing blood.

Then it just scratched his neck.

A third time it cut a gash into the other shoulder, and Captain Delorme became maddened, for he felt that his adversary held him at his mercy.

Another skillful movement of the wrist, and the chin of the naval officer was laid open.

"My God! he plays with him now," cried the colonel.

But still Don Andrea did not strike a fatal blow.

He seemed to wish to torture his foe to the utmost, to make him feel that death was before him, and all that death implied.

The Spanish officer was wild with rage, and Colonel Quitella called for a cessation of the combat for rest, fearing that his principal was being tired out, and hoping that a short respite would strengthen him.

"If you interfere, Señor Colonel, you shall answer to me."

The colonel of lancers started.

It was Señor Basila that addressed him, and he saw that the second of Don Andrea knew what he was about, and feeling that he was wrong, he said:

"I was wrong, señor, for it is a duel to the death."

His words were repeated, and by Don Andrea, who the moment after drove his sword to the very hilt in the body of Captain Delorme, piercing through his heart.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PROMISE.

DON DELORME, the famous naval officer was lead.

There was no denying that fact.

And he had been killed in a duel with the stranger who had purchased for cash, the grand home of the señor who had committed suicide when he saw his fortune going from him.

Then rumors set the usually quiet Spanish town half-wild with excitement. Who was this mysterious stranger who had so much money, at his command, and who also had run through the heart the best swordsman in Spain?

This question could only be answered with:

"He is Don Andrea De Costa of the castle."

The cause of the quarrel no one seemed to at first understand.

It was also said that Captain Delorme had stolen from Don Andrea his bride, the beautiful Señora Isabel.

With these rumors going about, and set afloat by Don Andrea himself in a secret way through Señor Basila, the sympathy of the people was with the avenger.

Don Delorme was never popular, and as he was dead, the populace determined to show their appreciation of his dying by all going to the funeral.

It was an affair that dwarfed the burial of the suicide.

But the Señora Isabel did not attend.

It was said that she was overcome by the shock.

At any rate she remained in the seclusion of her elegant home.

And from its seclusion, after the funeral some days, she learned that Don Andrea was becoming a great favorite in the town.

His purse was ever open to the poor, he was generous to all, courtly and kind, and above all he gave the finest dinners that had ever been known in that part of Spain.

It was not very long before the army and navy officers made Don Andrea their hero, and the citizens vied with each other in showing him honor.

His guest, too, Señor Basila, was greatly admired, and when it was given out that he was to return to his plantations in the Gem of the Antilles, all seemed to regret that he was not going to make his home forever with Don Andrea.

One afternoon, some two months after the death of Captain Delorme, Don Andrea De Costa was riding on horseback along the beach.

He had gone alone, as Señor Basila had accompanied a naval officer out to drive.

Suddenly the Don came upon a scene which he had not certainly expected to do.

Seated in a crevice among the rocks, sketching the scene along the curving shores, was a lady.

She was alone, and so engrossed in her work that she did not hear the hoof-falls of the horse in the yielding sand.

Her mantilla had fallen from her shoulders, her veil did not conceal her face, as it had been thrown back behind her, and her eyes were upon the work of her penitence.

In an instant the Don had dismounted.

He had never ridden that path before, and now he remembered that he was upon the grounds of the Delorme mansion, which was situated back upon the hill, nearly a quarter of a mile distant.

But he did not need to know this, to understand who it was that he beheld.

It was Isabel Delorme. In an instant he was advancing toward her, and from his lips fell her name.

"Isabel!"

She sprang to her feet in alarm.

Her album of sketches, pencil and mantilla, fell at her feet.

Her face flushed crimson and then became deathly white.

But then her lips parted with the low uttered name:

"Andrea!"

He had halted, and she did not move.

Both gazed at each other as though they would read the secrets of the others' heart.

"Isabel, will you bid me welcome after long years of exile from you?"

He spoke the words in low, touching earnestness.

"Welcome, Don Andrea."

She held forth her hand like a shy school-girl as she spoke.

He stepped forward, took it, caressed it an instant, bent over and kissed it with marked respect.

When he looked up her face was crimson.

"A cruel fate divided us, Isabel."

"Yes, a most cruel fate."

"Do you remember our last meeting?"

"Can I ever forget it, Andrea?"

"I left you then, supposing when next we met, you were to fly with me and become my bride."

"I remember."

"You were but seventeen years of age then, Isabel."

"I am twenty-eight now."

"And the same?"

"In all things."

"I left you then with a happy heart."

"I was twenty-four then; now I am thirty-five, and have passed through the experience of a hundred years."

"I have heard of your sufferings, Andrea."

"I was seized that night, carried away to an Algerian corsair, sold into slavery, and then it was that I suffered, for never expected I, Isabel, to see your loved face again."

"I dare not tell you what I went through."

"Let it be as a sealed book, never to be reopened."

"But through all I have loved you, been true to you, by the Allah of the Mabomedan, by the God of the Christian, I swear it."

"My fortune favored me with this world's riches, and I came back here."

"I am rich, vastly more so than men here believe, and I shall use my wealth for the good of humanity."

"I came back, and face to face I met you, with him, across an open grave."

"He came to call upon me, knew me, and the end came as I intended that it should."

"He made me what I was, he robbed me of my bride, for I have heard how you became his wife, after two years of waiting for my return, after giving me up for dead, that you might, with his riches, give your parents a happy, luxurious old age."

"I have avenged you, Isabel, I have avenged myself."

"He lies in his grave and by my hand."

"I tear from between us the phantom of that man, I bury his grim specter in the grave of forgetfulness, and, Isabel, when one year has passed from the day of his death, I shall ask you to become my wife."

"What will your answer be, Isabel?"

"Come, Andrea, and ask me, for I, too, shall let no grim specter come between us."

"Bless you, Isabel, and *adios*."

He raised his hat with courtly grace, turned, and mounting his horse rode on his way.

Arriving at home he said to Basila, who had also returned:

"I have seen her."

"Well?"

"When one year rolls away, from the day that I killed her husband, she will become my wife."

"I congratulate you, my dear Andrea, and now I will bid you farewell, for the world is before me yet, my fortune is yet to be made."

"Upon one condition I let you depart."

"Name it."

"Grant it unknown."

"I do."

"Come here just ten months from to-day to see Isabel become my wife."

"I will do so, if alive."

"You will be alive, Basila, for you were not born to be hanged—at least so soon."

"Then it is a compact."

Two days after they parted, the slaver captain to become the very idol of the people among whom he dwelt, and who little dreamed of what had been his past life, what a monster he had been, and the American to return to his own country to carve out a career of infamy for himself hardly second to that of the slaver captain.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

THE scene of my story is shifted from Spain, to America, and upon the shores of a Southern State.

Around a cheerful log fire, that made the shadows dance merrily upon the wall, sat three persons.

Two had begun to descend the hill of life, for their hair was whitening under the snows of half a century of years.

The one was an elderly man of majestic presence and a kindly face.

The other was a matron whose face proved her noble nature, for it was all kindness and love.

The third occupant of the room was a young man.

Perhaps thirty years of age, he had a face thoughtful and intelligent.

Dignity and nobility of soul sat upon his countenance, stamping every feature indelibly.

Upon the rug at his feet lay curled up a large Newfoundland dog, while on the hearth, purring away in blissful contentment, was a large cat.

It was a lovely home picture, and one would not dream that sorrow or sin could enter there.

Upon the wall over the high mantle hung a portrait.

It was of a youth upon the very threshold of manhood.

He resembled the elderly couple and the young man.

But his face wore a stamp of recklessness rather than of nobleness.

"Eight years to-night it is, husband, since our noble Basil bade us good-bye to go to college," said the devoted woman.

"Yes, wife, eight years, and now he must be quite a man," the father answered.

"It has been a year since we heard from him, and the last letter came from Spain," remarked Loyd Barton, who had become the rising physician of the little town in the outskirts of which the old homestead was situated.

"I hope he is doing well and wants for nothing," said the mother.

"Oh, Basil will prosper, wife, no fear of that, and he has done so, or he could never have sent us the handsome presents that he has."

"Yes, mother, Basil is all right and has sown his wild oats, you may depend upon it, and will come back to us a splendid man."

"I only wish I knew where to reach him with a letter, for in four months I am to marry, you know, and I would so like to have him at my wedding, and Celeste would, too, for she often asks me about my wandering brother."

"Yes, and the other day when she was here

she sat for a long time gazing up at his portrait, and said that he had such a handsome, fascinating face.

"I wonder if my boy looks like that now?"

And the mother sighed, while the eyes of the three turned upon the portrait hanging over the mantle.

Then the door slowly opened and noiselessly.

A tall form, clad in sailor garb, stood there gazing upon the three and unseen by them.

Up to his head went his hat and he doffed it, as with respect for the presence in which he stood.

Bronzed to the hue of a West Indian, but with his large, glorious eyes and perfect features the stamp of evil which had marred his beauty seemed to fade away before those who held him so dear, those who were pure and noble, and the bosom of Basil Barton, the outcast, the slaver, the pirate, heaved with an emotion that almost choked him.

As he stood there he had heard their words.

As he stood there he saw the picture of his boyhood, only his grand, noble brother grown to manhood, and the heads of his parents were bowed, their hair whitened by the years that had gone by.

And such was the home which he had left.

Those were the parents, the brother, whom he had deserted, to become a wanderer, an outcast, a slaver, and last a pirate.

What would he not have given in that awful moment to recall his past life of evil.

All that he had been came before him in its most appalling forms, and he felt almost crushed beneath the grim specters that trooped before his vision, haunting him with his misdeeds.

"Mother!"

The word broke from his lips in almost despairing tones.

The three occupants of the room were upon their feet in an instant, and the wanderer felt his mother's arms about his neck, her kiss upon his brow, and he almost shrank back when he knew his unworthiness.

Then, too, his father and brother grasped his hands, he was led to a seat before the fire, and the family-circle was complete, for the wanderer had returned.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WOLF IN THE FOLD.

How glad were the father, mother and brother of Basil Barton, at his return, can only be imagined, not told, for words would hardly be adequate to express their joy.

The sailor had come back after long years of absence.

Each year a letter had come from him, with some souvenirs for all, not forgetting the old family servants.

This had been proven that he had not ceased to remember those dear to him, and his gifts were such as to show that he was far beyond want.

Where he had been, what he had seen, what he was doing, all wished to learn.

He had told them such of his wanderings as he had cared for them to know.

He had told now he had risen to the command of a vessel, and owned the craft, too, having made most fortunate voyages in her.

While she was being resitted in a distant port he had come home to visit those he loved.

He had brought almost princely gifts, too.

There were silks, satins and laces for his mother, with handsome jewelry, too, such as had never been seen before in that part of the country.

There was an elegant watch and chain, and a gold-headed cane for his father, while his brother also came in for a watch and a case of surgical instruments such as he had never dreamed of purchasing, although his means were by no means straitened.

Had those to whom these presents were brought only known that they were purchased with gold earned in the slave trade and by piracy, how fearful would have been the knowledge!

Then there were curiosities from many lands for his brother's office, and when he learned that Doctor Loyd Barton was engaged to a beautiful maiden, a diamond ring worthy a princess was brought forth and presented to the lovely girl.

Ah! had she but known the history of that gem, how much of sorrow it would have saved her in the future.

Riding about with his brother, accompanying his father in his walks, or sitting upon the spacious piazza talking to his mother, Basil Barton seemed to dream away his days.

All his old friends had given him glad welcome, willing to forget how wild a boy he had been, and many wondered that the runaway youth had turned out so well.

Anxious to have his brother meet his intended wife, Doctor Barton had soon taken him out to the plantation of her father, Major Mortimer.

Basil gazed upon the beautiful girl with undisguised admiration, and she, too, seemed impressed with the dark-faced wanderer.

As he was to remain but a short while, she was engaged to his brother, no one

aught of the fact that Basil Barton passed about half his time with the maiden.

They rode horse-back together, sailed together upon the bay, and seemed to be very happy in each other's company.

Among his accomplishments Basil Barton sung well.

He possessed a rich, pathetic voice, full of music, and sang Spanish and French songs to the maiden.

Then he performed well upon the mandolin, and was a most brilliant conversationalist.

His manners were most winning, and he had a way about him that fairly fascinated all with whom he came in contact.

Then too he had traveled the world over and was familiar with foreign lands.

He had met with perils by sea and land, and, though reluctant to tell of his deeds, it was felt by many that his life had been a strange romance.

Loyd Barton, noble in nature, honest in heart and suspecting no evil, was happy that his brother so constantly sought the society of Celeste.

He could be little with her, as his professional duties kept him constantly busy.

At times he thought that Celeste seemed less glad to see him, and now and then she said things that cut him.

Still he suspected not the cause, until one morning he awoke to the truth, and a rude awakening it was.

Basil Barton had left home.

But he had not gone alone, for Celeste had accompanied him.

A note left upon her table had simply said that she was mistaken in believing that she had loved Loyd Barton.

Basil Barton was her beau ideal, her idol, and she had gone with him to become his wife.

This was all she said.

But the blow fell heavily upon her old father, who had never particularly liked the wanderer.

But Loyd Barton?

He was crushed to the earth in almost despair, and then revenge seized upon his breast and he started in pursuit of the fugitives.

Not only did he have to mourn a lost love, and that Celeste had been false to him; but he had to hug to the heart that his brother had proven himself a snake in the grass.

The brave man overtook the guilty ones, to fall from his horse severely wounded by a pistol-shot fired by his brother.

He was borne back to his home, and for a long time his life was despaired of.

But day and night his parents hung over him, and their devoted nursing saved him from death.

They had to hide their own grief, for his sake, and it told heavily upon them, and they never wholly rallied after the severe tax upon their strength.

Whither the runaway couple had gone no one knew.

But the old couple and their son had the sympathy of all.

Thus a year and more went by, and ugly rumors began to circulate through the town, that a bold and merciless buccaneer was scouring the seas and that his name was Basil.

Could it be that this bold sea-rover was Basil Barton?

Before long the truth came out, for a sailor from the little port, who had known him well, had been on a vessel of-war which had attacked Basil, the Buccaneer.

The two vessels had been within pistol-range, and, though the pirate had beaten off the cruiser, he had recognized in the outlaw chief no other than Basil Barton.

And by his side, the sailor had said, stood a woman, and as he had also known Celeste, he said that it was she.

This bitter blow was too much for old Mr. Barton and his wife to bear, and those who knew them best felt that they would not last many years.

The father went first, and a year after Doctor Barton buried his mother and was left alone in the old homestead, and it was there that his wicked brother sought him, as has been told in the earlier chapters of my story, to go on board his vessel and save his innocent child from death.

He who had proven a wolf in the fold had dared to go back to the brother whom he had so deeply wrung and beg him to save his child's life.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PIRATE'S BRIDE.

As Basil Barton had told his noble brother, the doctor, when he carried him on board the schooner Spiteful, to see his sick boy, he had warped the feelings of Celeste Mortimer against him.

He had fascinated her fairly, and so gotten her under his influence that the feeling which she had believed love, when felt for Loyd Barton, she felt little deserved the name of affection even.

When he had told her of his love for her, and

asked her to fly with him, poor Celeste, charmed as a bird by a snake, could not say nay.

He painted glowing pictures of his vessel, of the pleasure she would have in seeing foreign lands, of his deep love for her, and she yielded to his almost command and fled with him.

Her first awakening had been when she had seen Basil Barton deliberately fire upon his brother, and that brother fall from his horse.

In her horror she almost fled from him, back to the wounded man.

"I have but stunned him, Celeste, to save your life and mine, for he surely meant to kill us.

"I am a dead shot, and merely fired to slightly wound him," Basil had said.

And she had believed him.

But did he love her?

Let the story reveal whether he did or not.

Together they reached a small village, and were there married by a good old clergyman who knew not the sacrilege instead of sacrament he was performing by uniting those two in the bonds of wedlock.

Driving on their way in haste, by nightfall they came in sight of the sea, and there, in a secluded retreat, hidden by forest-lined shores, lay a vessel at anchor.

It was a beautiful craft, the schooner which Basil Barton had himself drawn the model of, and which had been a gift to him from Don Andrea De Costa, the slaver captain.

Leaving Spain he had returned to America to find his vessel ready for him.

He had selected his own crew and then set sail for Cuba, where the armament of his vessel awaited him.

There he had trebled his crew, and, with as wild a set of cut-throats under his command as ever trod a deck, he boldly hoisted the black flag and began his infamous career as Basil, the Buccaneer.

It was soon after that his vessel was badly handled in a fight with an American cruiser, and seeking a secure retreat, where he could refit, he had taken that opportunity to go to his home.

And with Celeste as his bride he returned to his vessel, which was in perfect ship-shape once more and ready for sea.

Little did she know, as she went on board the beautiful vessel and was ushered into the luxuriously furnished cabin, that she had become a pirate's bride.

She noted the guns and the large crew as she went on board, and spoke of them to her husband, who quickly returned:

"Do you not know, my child, that in these days of piracy, a vessel, trading as mine does in every sea, is allowed to go armed?"

Celeste did not know it, but the explanation satisfied her.

Then the craft set sail and the young wife was happy, in spite of the haunting memory that she had wounded deeply one noble heart, and had left her father to mourn over her act in running away.

After a few days at sea, Basil Barton felt that he could no longer hide from Celeste his real character.

He knew that she must be told, and better that he should break the news to her than that she should discover it otherwise, for the shock would be great.

He loved her in his way, and was happy in having her with him.

But his nature was as fickle as the wind, where a woman was concerned, and another face might cause him to tire of Celeste he well knew.

Several times he made up his mind to the confession, and then felt that he dared not do so.

At last he decided that the time was near at hand for him to keep his appointment with Don Andrea De Costa, and he was glad of a chance to procrastinate, and gave orders to put away for the coast of Spain.

It was night when the pirate schooner ran into the port, and while poor Celeste slept below, a complete change was made in the vessel.

Her guns were sent down into the hold, her ports sealed up and about two-thirds of her crew were compelled to go into hiding.

Hastily leading Celeste to the gangway, when the Spiteful, as he had named his vessel, dropped anchor, Basil Barton was glad to see that she did not notice the change.

Then they were rowed ashore to a hotel, and the pirate captain sallied forth early the next morning to see Don Andrea De Costa.

"I knew that you would come," said the retired slaver, grasping both his hands, and then listening with the deepest interest to the story which the American had to tell.

"You are sure that your wife does not suspect you?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"I know that she does not."

"Well, you have taken desperate chances coming here with your vessel."

"But your wife must come here at once with you, for you know I gladly welcome you both, and it lacks but three days to the time set for my wedding with Isabel, though I should have delayed it, had you not arrived."

"Not a shadow of suspicion has Isabel against me, and I would rather die than she should have."

"Would to heaven that you could hide your career from your wife."

"It will be impossible."

"The world knows me now, as I am, or soon will, and if Celeste does not cling to me, she can go her way," was the reply of Basil the Buccaneer.

"Well, we will drive down at once to your hotel, and bring your wife here," and as they drove along in the splendid equipage of the slaver captain, Basil asked:

"What do the town think of your marrying the Senora Isabel?"

"They are surprised that I should marry the widow of the man I killed, but they keep their surprise from exhibition before her or myself."

"I have never entered the Don's home, have written all that I had to say to Isabel, and have kept aloof to guard against all scandal."

"She has erected a handsome monument over the dead Don, and gives his entire wealth, the day she becomes my wife, to charity."

"Thus it stands, and if any man casts a slur he answers to me."

Up to the grand home of the slaver captain Celeste went as a guest, and that afternoon Basil and his wife drove over to the house of Senora Delorme and called upon her.

She had already received a long letter from the Don telling of the visit, and she had known that Basil was the devoted friend of the man she was to marry, so she gave to him and his lovely wife a warm greeting.

Three days after, at the cathedral doors, Don Andrea De Costa met his bride leaning upon the arm of Basil Barton, or Senor Basila Bartona as he was called in Spain.

The buccaneer chief gave the bride away, and then all drove to the castle, while the busy tongues of the gossips wagged at the thought that the Senora Isabel had married the man who had slain her husband.

Don Andrea gave most liberally to the poor on that day of his wedding, and the wealth of the señora, which had been Don Delorme's, was given over to charity.

The next morning when the sun rose the citizens were surprised to find that the trim schooner in which Senor Basila Bartona had come to Spain to attend the wedding of his friend had set sail during the night, and many wondered that he had remained so short a time.

The reason was a good one, however, for the sudden sailing of the Spiteful, as the reader will discover when the cause is revealed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MASK TORN OFF.

In the midst of the wedding dinner at The Castle, when Basila Bartona was toasting the health, happiness and long life of the bride and groom, and Don Andrea was returning the compliment for his guests, a servant entered with the information that a sailor was without and wished to speak with the Cuban señor, for the buccaneer was still believed to be a planter from the Gem of the Antilles.

Don Andrea glanced at Basil somewhat anxiously, but the latter finished his toast, and then asking to be excused, left the table.

No guests had been invited by Don Andrea.

He had made many friends in the town, and had become noted for his famous dinners and entertainments; but he was determined that his wedding should be a strictly private affair, and the buccaneer and his bride were the only ones to grace his board after Isabel had become the Senor De Costa.

The Spanish beauty had learned how to speak English quite well, and she was charmed with the golden-haired Celeste, who in time learned to love Senora Isabel, and neither held a suspicion of what their husbands had been, and one still was.

Upon going out of the grand dining salon to see who his visitor could be, Basil Barton showed no sign of emotion.

Yet he was nervous, for he had given orders that no communication was to be held with the shore, nor was a man to be allowed to land under any consideration.

"Ah, Ponce, it is you?" he said, as he saw a young Cuban awaiting him.

It was a youth whose life the buccaneer had saved several years before in Cuba, when he was a mate on the Sea Venus, and one day when in Havana, before his visit home, the Cuban had recognized him, and anxious to serve him, had been willing to follow his fortunes.

Basil had found him true as steel, and when he had gone ashore at the Spanish seaport, he had told the Cuban to watch the crew well for him.

"Yes, señor, and I am here with news," said Ponce.

"How did you get ashore, Ponce?"

"Swam, señor, for see, I am all wet."

"So you are; but what is up?"

"You told me to keep my eyes open, Señor Captain!"

"Yes."

"I did so, and discovered that there was a traitor on board."

"Ah! and who is he?"

"The youth we shipped in Trinidad, señor."

"What, Vandel?"

"Yes, señor."

"What has he done?"

"I heard him arrange with two men to go on watch at eight bells to-night, to lower themselves over the bows and swim ashore with him."

"He does not swim, you know and they are to aid him."

"Deserters?"

"That is not all, Señor Captain, for they were to go to the commandant of the fort and offer, in return for pardon for themselves and a sum in gold, to betray the secret of Basil, the Buccaneer, and that his vessel was in port."

"My God! Vandel did this?"

"He plotted it, señor."

"And the others?"

"Are Presto and Dornez."

"And what else heard you, my good Ponce?"

"That was all, señor."

"Heaven knows that it is enough."

"At eight bells to-night, you say?"

"Yes, señor, at midnight."

"And how did you get away, Ponce?"

"I entered the cabin, señor, and let myself out of the stern port."

"I shall not forget you, my good Ponce."

"Can you return the same way?"

"Yes, señor."

"Do so, and within the hour I will be on board."

"It is now nine o'clock."

Ponce departed, and re-entering the salon Basil resumed his seat, and said in a pleasant way:

"What if I told you, Don Andrea, that we would have to depart to-night?"

All were at once surprised at this sudden resolve, but Basil stated that he had news of a character which would cause him to sail, and while Celeste went off with Señora Isabel to make her preparations to leave, the buccaneer captain told the Spaniard what he had heard from Ponce.

"The traitors!"

"You will hang them, of course?"

"Yes, before the day dawns," and half an hour after Basil and Celeste, wondering at this strange move of her husband, were in a shore-boat making their way out to the schooner.

The officer in charge was somewhat surprised to see his captain come on board, but Basil made no explanation and ordered the anchor up at once and sail set.

"They are here yet, Ponce?" he asked of the young Cuban, who had returned to the schooner by swimming.

"Yes, señor; but it would be well to arrest them at once, as they may suspect something."

The order was given to at once put the three traitors in irons, and their looks and actions showed that they were guilty.

Celeste had gone to the cabin, to retire, at the request of Basil, and hardly had the schooner gotten well under way, when the crew were ordered upon deck, and the guns were also taken from the hold.

The buccaneer stood gazing on in grim silence, and when the vessel was in ship-shape and fighting trim once more, he said:

"Let our colors be run up."

The officer next in command obeyed the order, and the black flag, which had not been raised since the coming of Celeste on board, fluttered out from the peak in the gray of dawn, as the swift craft went dashing along over the sea.

"Bring the traitors on deck!"

The men looked at each other in surprise, while Ponce went to order the two guards to bring up the prisoners they had in charge.

"Men, I placed confidence in you by going into the fort we have just left."

"Your lives, my own and the ship were all in your hands."

"Out of this crew of seventy men, three have proven treacherous, and they will soon confront you."

"They sought to betray the vessel and our lives, in return for their pardon and gold!"

"How I found out their secret it matters not; but they gave us a close call for the gallows, as at midnight they were to swim ashore and make their terms with the commandants of the fort."

"Señor Marco, rig three ropes with which to string up three traitors."

The pirate officer addressed quickly obeyed the order, and in deathlike silence the crew stood, waiting the execution.

A moment more Ponce came aft, followed by the two guards and the three prisoners.

Day was just beginning to dawn, and the gray light gave to the pale faces of the three men a most ghastly look.

They confirmed it their chief in the room, and his gaze rested upon them with a wicked glare that was terrible.

"Why did you seek to betray this vessel?" he asked sternly.

He addressed his words to Vandel, a handsome young sailor who was the center of the trio, and whom Ponce had said was the plotter.

"These men but obeyed my bidding, so spare

them, as I am the guilty one," said the young sailor firmly.

"I spare no traitor, be he more or less guilty."

"You must hang."

"Will you not spare these two men when I tell you that I alone am guilty?" pleaded the sailor.

"No."

"You will hang them, too?"

"Yes."

"Will not my death at a rope's end atone for their crimes as well as my own?"

"It will not."

"The three of you shall die."

"Basil Barton, would you hang a woman?"

The buccaneer chief started, and a shudder went through the men, inured as they were to scenes of bloodshed and infamy.

"Are you a woman?" hoarsely asked Basil Barton, peering earnestly into the face of the young sailor.

"I am."

"Who are you?"

"I am the Cuban girl, Lila Noel, whom you won to love you and then deserted."

"I vowed revenge, and to get it I cut off my hair, assumed this disguise and shipped on board your vessel."

"Caramba! but you are right! you are Lila Noel, and now I know why it is that your face has haunted me since the day you came on board."

"You well-nigh got your revenge, woman."

"Very nearly, for had you not found out my plot, a suot while more and you, Basil Barton, would have stood, with your vile crew, where we three now stand."

"Will you not spare these men now, and let my death atone, for you are merciless, I suppose?"

"I am, alike to men and women."

"Up with them!"

The noose about their necks tightened, and seeing the expression upon the face of their chief, the men holding the other ends of the ropes dared not hesitate, and up into mid-air went the three forms, while from aft came a wild shriek, and springing from the companion-way Celeste fell like one death-stricken upon the deck.

She had heard and seen all, and she knew her husband, Basil, the Buccaneer, as he really was.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CELESTE'S LOVE.

WHEN Basil Barton heard the shriek of Celeste ring out, in the crisp air of early dawn, it seemed to pierce his heart like a knife.

Hardened as he was to crime, he yet could not but feel that his unfortunate young wife had been dealt a fearful blow.

The woman, Lila Noel, he had met when on his return voyages to Cuba, while a slaver.

She was the daughter of a Cuban fisherman, pretty and fascinating, and not knowing what his real life was, she had loved him.

Alas! her fate had been that of many another unfortunate whose faith has been placed in man.

Merciless alike, as he had said, to men and women, he had deserted her, while she, with her love turned to undying hate, had vowed to be avenged.

She had tracked him to his vessel, and yet was too late to strike the death-blow that she had intended.

Time went by, when one day while in Trinidad with her father, she saw Basil Barton in the street.

He did not see her and she shrank from his sight, dogged his footsteps, and finding that he had a vessel there, she at once determined to ship on board of it.

Her wealth of black hair was shaved off, a sailor suit disguised her sex and with a skull-cap pulled well down over her eyes, she passed readily for a young seaman, and enlisted on the schooner, which had put into port as an American merchantman.

Then it was that she discovered just what the man was whom she had loved.

She would have betrayed him when the schooner was in American waters, but she could not swim, and only picked men were allowed to go ashore in the boats.

When she saw Celeste come on board as the wife of the buccaneer captain, she hated him the more, and sought all in her power to get a chance to speak with the deceived girl.

She saw that Basil was deceiving her, as he floated the American flag at the peak, and captured no prizes.

Biding her time, the opportunity at last offered when in the Spanish port.

Two seamen on board she saw were not as wild as their fellow.

These she sought to save and appealed to him to aid her, remitting them all the price paid them by the Spaniards, and telling them she alone acted for revenge.

But for the Cuban boy, Ponce, Basil, the Buccaneer's career would have ended very suddenly at a rope's end.

But she played against fate and won.

for Basil, the Buccaneer proved his words that he was merciless alike to men and women.

"The lad lies! he is the brother of the girl he claimed to be."

"Hurl the bodies into the sea!"

So came the stern words from the lips of the buccaneer, and his order was obeyed with a promptness that showed how his crew dreaded his anger.

Hastily bound, though not yet dead, the three traitors were thrown overboard.

Whether the men behind knew that their chief had killed a woman, or not, they dared not express an opinion, and the truth of her words, or untruth, the sea concealed.

Then, when the forms went downward through the green waves, the merciless man walked rapidly aft.

The schooner was bounding on her way, neither of the two men at the wheel daring to spring to the aid of Celeste, and she lay where she had fallen, when Basil the Buccaneer reached her side.

He raised her in his arms, as though she had been a child, and bore her into the cabin.

There he placed her upon a silken lounge, and at once applied restoratives.

"It were better did she never revive," he muttered, and his words held some pity, as he gazed upon her white, beautiful face, as she lay in startling resemblance to death.

But she was not dead, and soon showed signs of returning consciousness.

The light of day stole into the cabin, dimming the lamp, and after a deep sigh, the eyes of the lovely girl opened.

He expected her to at once go into hysterics at sight of him.

He dreaded a scene. But instead she raised her hand and softly rested it upon his head.

"God pity you, Basil, and me!"

So unexpected were her soft, pathetic words, that he bowed his haughty, guilty head and groaned.

The manhood in him was not yet all gone, and she had touched his heart.

A long silence followed, and then, still lying there, still resting her hand, trembling though it was, upon his head, she said:

"Basil, can man be more wicked than I have found you to be, for I heard all."

"I heard that you were a pirate, that this was a buccaneer vessel, and I know that you deceived me and poor Loyd."

"I heard the story of that woman—"

"It was no woman, Celeste, as I knew, but the brother of the girl he claimed to be."

"Thank God for that!"

"You have not at least the guilt on your soul of having hanged a woman."

He shuddered, and she asked:

"What was she to you, Basil—your wife?"

"No! as heaven is my judge, Celeste, you are the only woman who has the right to call me husband!"

"Again I thank Heaven, for my own sake, Basil, and that you are not more guilty than you are."

"And now you hate me, Celeste?"

"Ah, no! I love you."

"Knowing me to be what I am?"

"Yes."

"A pirate?"

"Still I love you, Basil."

"After I have deceived you?"

"It is my nature to kiss the hand that has crushed me, it seems, for still I love you."

"My God! can woman's love be true as yours?"

"Yes, often."

"This is no part you are playing, Celeste?"

He did not say her name, suspicious ever of truth and honor.

"Ah, Basil, you have no right to doubt me."

"I am your wife, I love you, and I hope to redeem you some day."

"Now let us speak no more of what has been," and putting her arms about his neck she kissed him.

But did she tremble, or shudder, as she did so? Which, he could not tell.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A WOMAN'S DESPAIR.

BASIL BARTON was almost a changed man, after his interview with Celeste.

Had she stormed at him, upbraided him, and told him that she hated him, then he would have met her with scorn and indifference.

But her forgiveness of him, not a word of censure falling from her lips, almost unmanned him.

The Last of the Pirates.

his having put her to death haunted their chief.

Ponce had been sent at once for the woman's kit, and had it been looked over by others, the truth would have come out that Basil, the Buccaneer had hanged a woman.

Sailors are ever superstitious, and those on board the Spiteful, were no exception to the rule.

They wished to feel that the three who had gone up to the yard-arm were men, as ill-fortune would certainly follow them, had one been the girl she claimed to be.

Seeing that his men seemed to feel his humor, Basil cast it off and his voice rang through the schooner with stern orders.

The kits of the three "traitors" were thrown into the sea, and a bright lookout was ordered kept for any prize.

What the result of Celeste's fainting had been, the crew could only conjecture, for not even Lieutenant Marco had had the temerity to go near the companionway, so that he could overhear what had taken place in the cabin.

During the afternoon a vessel was sighted, and three hours after was captured.

She proved to be a richly-freighted Spaniard, and the most valuable part of her cargo was quickly transferred to the hold of the Spiteful, and, for the sake of Celeste, the crew and vessel were allowed to go upon their way.

During the night two vessels were sighted, and the Spiteful was found to be directly in between them.

Captain Basil was called on deck, at once pronounced them to be Spanish cruisers, and set off in flight, edging toward the smaller of the two.

It was a perilous trap to be in, and a critical time; but the nerve and skill of the buccaneer chief extricated his vessel and pursuit was checked by a well-aimed shot that cut away the foremast of the fleeter of the two vessels.

With this escape, and the prize, the crew decided that the one claiming to be a woman could not have been so, but her brother, as their captain had said, for surely his luck had not deserted him.

But, though Basil quickly got back his wonted spirits, Celeste seemed not unable to do so.

She was ever affectionate, greeted Basil with a smile, though one that was as sad as tears, and seemed to try to be happy.

But her every effort was a dismal failure.

Her heart had received its death-wound, and her buoyant spirit was broken.

And so the days made weeks, and the weeks months, until nearly a year had gone by.

Basil, the Buccaneer, had grown more and more stern as Celeste's face saddened.

His fortune clung to him, for prize after prize was taken, he boldly entered West Indian and South American ports and got rid of his pirate booty.

His crew feared him, yet admired and were attached to him.

He fought off cruisers when attacked, and seemed half as willing to fight a foe as to run from him.

But all this time Celeste was fading away.

He sought to have her go ashore and live at some secluded place, where she would regain her health.

But she refused to leave him.

"I will remain with you, Basil, to the end," was her reply.

She seemed to be suffering from no disease, but simply to be fading away like a flower.

Her heart was broken, and she was slowly but surely dying.

One night she was standing upon deck, gazing out over the moonlit waters.

The schooner was in the Mexican Gulf, cruising slowly along under a four-knot breeze, and the air was balmy and soothing.

The crew were forward, several of them singing some touching melody, and Basil the Buccaneer was in the cabin, looking over his "gains," as he called the sales of his piratical booty.

The singing of the men forward touched Celeste deeply.

The four seamen who were singing had fine voices, and their comrades were all silent, listening as though under a spell.

Perhaps it carried them back through their wicked lives, and touched their consciences.

It fell upon the heart of poor Celeste like a death-knell.

She trembled violently and tried to be calm, but without avail.

The song ceased; but only for a moment, when the voices broke forth with another ballad.

By a strange fatality it was a song which she had often heard Loyd Barton sing.

It carried her back to her girlhood, her maidhood, and the mask seemed to drop from her face and heart.

It was honor and true manhood that she had really loved, not the semblance of them, and she felt that she had been under a spell of fascination, that Loyd Barton was her ideal and her idol.

Like an overwhelming avalanche the thought of all that she had lost rushed upon her, and with a wild, despairing shriek she sprung into the sea.

Basil the Buccaneer sprung to his feet as that

shriek rang in his ears, and dashing on deck heard the fatal words:

"The señora sprung into the sea, señor, and Ponce has gone after her—see, there is her white dress upon that wave!"

Overboard he went, and with a few strong strokes reached the drowning woman.

He took her in his arms, and swam toward the boat, which had been quickly lowered, for the schooner had been promptly brought to.

Into the boat she was tenderly taken, and soon she was in the cabin.

But, though her eyes were fixed upon him in recognition, Celeste never spoke again, but with a shudder breathed her last.

And as she did so, a cry was heard on deck:

"It is the boy! see! he has sunk from sight."

It was true, for in the excitement poor Ponce had been forgotten, and he had failed to regain the vessel.

And so the outlawed vessel sailed on her way, heading for the land, to there bury the remains of the pirate's bride, while deep down into his grave beneath the sea sunk poor Ponce, the Cuban boy, who had bravely lost his life in striving to save poor Celeste.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RESCUE, AND A MYSTERY.

In the harbor of a seaport, situated upon an island of the West Indies, a vessel-of-war was lying at anchor.

At the peak fluttered the Stars and Stripes, and about her there was everything to show the trim, well-disciplined American cruiser.

Among a hundred other vessels in the harbor was a schooner, lying a few cable-lengths away from the cruiser, and upon which the eyes of several officers on the deck of the latter were resting.

The schooner was as shapely a craft as ever sailed the seas, and though having the appearance of a trader, was certainly handsome enough for an armed cutter.

The Stars and Stripes also floated at her peak, and her decks looked clean and all about her ship-shape.

The officers upon the American vessel-of-war were discussing the schooner with some animation, for their sailor eyes had at once discovered her beauty of model, and the rake and taper of her lofty masts.

"She's too neat by far for a trader," said a senior lieutenant.

"Yes, sir, and I only wish Uncle Sam had her with a good battery and crew on board," a midshipman responded.

"She is saucy enough looking to have a suspicious look."

"But her colors protect her from suspicion, even in these waters, for were she flying the Spanish flag, Portuguese, Brazilian or Peruvian, I would be suspicious of her, indeed," remarked a junior lieutenant.

Then the eyes of all turned from the pretty schooner to an inky cloud that had suddenly appeared, rising like magic almost from the sea.

"All hands aboy to strip ship for gale!" rung out the order, and the topmasts were housed, sails closely furled, a second anchor let go, and the cruiser was ready for the tempest within ten minutes.

In those latitudes a hurricane arises with wondrous rapidity, and it could be seen that the black cloud was spreading and threatened mischief.

The various vessels in the harbor, following the example of the cruiser, stripped for the gale, but in a lubberly way in comparison, excepting the pretty schooner.

Her crew went to work with the alertness and discipline of man-of-war's-men, and won the admiration of the officers and seamen of the cruiser.

"There comes Randolph's boat!" suddenly called out the lieutenant, and he pointed to where a boat from the vessel-of-war was discerned under sail, heading out from the town.

"He should not have started in the teeth of this coming tempest," said one.

"The land shut it from his sight, sir, and he does not yet see it from where he is," came reply.

"That is so; but seeing the vessels all stripping will give him warning."

"But he must come on now, unless he runs to the schooner for shelter until the blow is over."

"Lieutenant Randolph will come on, for he has no fear, and I only hope he will reach us—no, it is too late!"

As the officer spoke there came a sound in the air as of a thousand wings, and the tempest was upon them.

The little boat, one from the cruiser, and containing an officer, coxswain and four oarsmen, had up a small leg-of-mutton sail.

Under the increasing wind it was driving swiftly along, and her course lay direct for the cruiser, the boat having stood off on an outer tack so as to reach the vessel when she should head toward it after going about.

This course would carry her very near the schooner, and it might be that the officer in command of the boat would run to her for succor.

But whatever his intention had been, the tornado took him unawares, for, sweeping down from the clouds upon him, the boat was seized with terrific force and hurled bottom upward into the maelstrom which the tempest wrought in an instant of time.

The young officer had not time to even give an order to his men, when he was thrown into the water and an oar dashed against his head with a force that stunned him.

Driven before the fury of the tempest, the shattered boat, oars and men were being swept by the schooner, when suddenly a commanding voice shouted:

"Now follow me, men!"

Into the wild waters from the schooner sprung half a dozen forms, with ropes lashed about their waists, and the young officer was seized by one as he was driving by.

It was the one who had given the order for them to spring into the sea.

The officer was conscious, but dazed, and could not help himself.

But strong arms held him, and strong hands hauled in on the ropes, and the rescuer and rescued were dragged on board the schooner.

"The coxswain and three men gone; but God bless you for our lives," said a seaman, as he saw that two of those in the boats had not been saved.

Into the cabin the rescuer of the young officer aided him, and at once set about doing all he could to serve him, for the blow on his head had been a severe one and blood was flowing freely from a gash over his ear.

From the deck of the cruiser the fate of the boat, and the gallant rescue had been seen, and a cheer went up from officers and crew.

Then the tempest was upon them, and the schooner was shut out from view.

For half an hour the tornado swept over the harbor, lashing the waves into fury, and bringing a darkness like unto night.

The good ship tugged savagely at her anchors, rolled and pitched, and the wind howled like shrieking demons through the rigging.

But fortunately the tornado was too furious to last long, the clouds blew over, the sunlight came once more, and the winds lulled rapidly.

A glance over the harbor showed that the vessels in the harbor had many of them been hard hit by the tornado.

Some had been driven ashore, others had been capsized, many had dragged their anchors, while a few, like the American cruiser, had remained firmly at their anchors and suffered no damage.

A sigh of relief came from many lips, when they saw the dark clouds roll by, beheld the bright sunshine come out once more and saw the blackness which had rested for awhile upon the sea and land pass away.

Then the gaze of all on board the cruiser turned toward the schooner, to see how she had ridden out the gale.

She was not there!

A cry of alarm went up in a chorus from a hundred throats, at sight of this.

Had the beautiful craft foundered?

Had she been capsized and sunk with all on board?

The shore was searched to see if she had been driven upon it.

Every vessel was conned over to see if she was not among them.

An officer of the cruiser, the senior lieutenant, Rodney Randolph, was known to have been picked up by the schooner's crew, and thus double interest was felt in the pretty craft and her fate.

Officers and men looked at each other in alarm, and over the minds of the more superstitious a feeling of dread began to steal, for the mysterious disappearance of the schooner was beyond their knowledge to solve.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE STRANGE SCHOONER.

"*THERE is the schooner! see!*"

The cry fairly burst in a yell from the lips of a midshipman on board the United States vessel-of-war at anchor in the little harbor of an island in the West Indies.

When the tempest had swept over, leaving wreck and destruction in its wake, and the pretty schooner was nowhere visible in the harbor, a feeling of deep sadness had fallen upon the officers and crew, for Lieutenant Rodney Randolph, next in rank to their captain, was a favorite with all on board.

A handsome, dashing fellow, brave as a lion, a skillful officer, and devoted to the interests of his men, no man in the navy was more highly regarded, and a glee had come upon the cruiser's crew when it was believed that he had, after being wrecked in the boat, gone down in the schooner, whose men had rescued him.

But the eyes of all had been searching the harbor shore and waters, and not until the midshipman glanced seaward and beheld the vessel rushing back into port from seaward, did any one think of looking oceanward.

But the cry of the middy turned every eye out to sea.

There, coming back through the channel, was the schooner, sure enough.

She was under single-reefed sails and standing up well under the pressure of the wind, still quite strong.

The sea without was very wild, and the waves ran high where the schooner was; but she did not seem to mind them and came on like a frightened race-horse.

Her topmasts were roughly housed, her bowsprit, which was very long, had been drawn in-board over half its length, and with forestaysail, foresail and mainsail, all single-reefed, she was coming along at a terrific speed.

Straight into the harbor she ran, and when near her former anchorage wore around as though on a pivot, and when her sharp bows pointed directly into the wind's eye, the anchors were let fall and sail lowered with a quickness and skill that won the admiration of the cruiser's men.

Soon after a boat was lowered from its davits, and in spite of the still rough waters, headed toward the cruiser.

There was considerable excitement on the cruiser as Lieutenant Randolph was seen to be in the stern, while the keen eye of the middy, who had discovered the schooner coming in from seaward, also saw that there were two of the boat's crew missing.

"The others must be on board, Midshipman Vancourt," said his superior officer.

"A coxswain and four men went ashore with Lieutenant Randolph, sir, and but three besides the lieutenant are in yonder coming boat, at least of our crew," said the middy confidently.

"You are right, for I see but three besides Randolph," the officer remarked, after turning his glass a moment upon the coming boat.

"The coxswain and one of the seamen are missing, sir," Midshipman Vancourt said.

"Perhaps they have been left ashore."

"No, sir, for there were six in the boat when the tornado swamped it."

"Then the two must be lost."

So all decided, and gloom rested upon every face.

"Yes," replied the lieutenant who had his glass to his eye.

"I recognize Randolph distinctly, and he is hatless and has his handkerchief tied about his head."

"The coxswain is not there, nor one of the men, and the other three belong to the schooner, the man at the helm being doubtless the skipper of the craft, and a fine-looking fellow he is too."

"He sails his boat well, sir," said Midshipman Vancourt, as he saw the coming boat so well managed in the rough waters.

"He does indeed, and he keeps his two men at the sheet-ropes, ready to obey his slightest bidding."

"But how did the schooner get out to sea?"

This question seemed to puzzle all.

"Doubtless ripped her cables and ran out in the blow."

"In fact she surely did so, for how else could she have gotten to sea?"

"It was a risky thing to do."

"Her skipper is a thorough sailor, that is certain."

"I hope he is the one at the helm of the boat, bringing Lieutenant Randolph and his men home."

"Yes, I should like to meet him, for a gallant fellow he certainly is."

Thus the conversation went around the group, while the schooner's boat drew nearer and nearer.

At length when she was but a ship's-length away, and running for the lee of the cruiser, the lieutenant in command called out:

"Three cheers, lads, all, for the schooner, her gallant skipper and crew!"

The cheers were given with a will, and a moment after the boat was alongside, and the lieutenant and his men scrambled on board.

"You will not come on board, Captain Barton?"

"No, thank you, Lieutenant Randolph."

"Well, then, *au revoir*, for we'll see you before long, for my brother officers and self will board you in force to-morrow to pay our respects."

"Ay, ay, sir, you will be most welcome," and the speaker raised his cap, the boat swung off, and as it went dashing away toward the schooner, the crew of the cruiser again gave its gallant commander three cheers.

He turned his face, raised his cap and sped on in silence, while Rodney Randolph received the congratulations of his brother officers upon his escape.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LIEUTENANT'S STORY.

WHEN Lieutenant Rodney Randolph stepped upon the deck of his vessel, all saw that he had been a sufferer.

His face was pale, and the handkerchief about his head was stained with blood.

The men, too, wore a subdued look and went forward among the mates with the air of having something to tell.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind

wishes; but let me first see the surgeon, and I will be glad to tell you of my experience," said the young officer, and he entered the cabin, accompanied by the surgeon of the cruiser.

The captain was confined to his cabin by a wounded foot, received a few weeks before in a brush with a buccaneer, and he gave the lieutenant a cordial greeting, remarking as he did so:

"My dear Randolph, I am most happy to see you back, for the officers have been chattering like magpies upon deck, and I feared from their words that you were lost."

"I came pretty near it, sir, I assure you; but let me report that I saw the commandant, sir, and he will supply you with the ammunition you require."

"That is good, indeed; but you are wounded?"

"A blow on the head from an oar when our boat was swamped, and I am sorry to report that I lost the coxswain and one of the men."

"That is sad, very sad; but I suppose it could not be avoided, for that was a terrific tornado, and at times I feared for the ship's safety, as she rocked and plunged fearfully."

"It was the worst blow I ever experienced, sir, if I except one I was once in on the African Coast some years ago when on the watch for slavers."

"But the sky was cloudless when I left the town, sir, and I stood out on the port tack, expecting to reach well over across the harbor and fetch the cruiser on the starboard tack."

"The land hid the storm from me, though I saw all the vessels in the harbor stripping for some reason, and I suspected a tempest was rising."

"I was too far over in the harbor to put back, so could only stand on, hoping to reach the cruiser, or a schooner that was at anchor not far distant, ere the storm should strike me—the bone is all right, surgeon?"

The last was to the surgeon, who had been closely examining the wound while the lieutenant talked.

"It was a severe blow, Lieutenant Randolph, and cut deep; but fortunately the bone was not injured."

"A few stitches will close the wound and you will soon be all right," answered the surgeon.

"The schooner's captain wished to sew it up and dress it for me, but I said I would wait until I got into your hands, surgeon, though I do not doubt he knew how, for he is a remarkable man."

"But for him, captain, we would all have been drowned, for the tempest swooped down on us from aloft, never having touched the water until it struck the boat."

"We were fairly torn from the boat, which was picked up and buried into the sea again with a force that shattered it."

"An oar struck me on the head, and I became dazed, while I think the coxswain was killed by the boat falling upon him."

"We were driven along then right down upon the schooner, I in a half-stunned condition and unable to help myself."

"But I heard a loud order given, forms leaped into the sea from the schooner, I was seized in the strong arms of the schooner's captain, and a moment after was drawn on board, for he and his men, with ropes lashed about them, had come to our rescue."

"I was still unable to help myself; yet I could see and hear indistinctly."

"I heard them cry out that one man had swept by to death, and then the tempest struck the schooner."

"Then came a loud clang sound, and I knew that the cable had parted."

"But, almost in an instant it seemed, the captain had his vessel under storm-sails and she was driving seaward."

"I had been taken to the cabin; but I could not stay there, as I the better recovered my senses, and I crept upon deck."

"The captain himself was at the helm, every man was at his post, and the schooner was driving along with frightful velocity."

"I could see no land, nothing but water and blackness."

"Yet he seemed to see, or to feel his way, and soon he said:

"We have reached over water, lads."

"It was true, for he had run the gantlet of the channel out to sea."

"In a short while the tornado had swept by, and the schooner was at once put back for the harbor, and in half an hour we had run in and dropped anchor near where the vessel was before, and a better seaman and a better craft I never saw, Captain Wingate."

"A splendid fellow he must be, and he shall not be forgotten," said the cruiser's commander, deeply interested in the story of his lieutenant.

"But, go on, Randolph, and let me hear all," and the lieutenant, whose wound was now dressed, continued:

"As I had this wound, the captain offered to dress it up for me, but I said I preferred to wait until I returned to the cruiser, and he said he would at once take me on board."

"As I looked at him, and heard his voice, I

was sure that we had met before, so I said to him:

"My name is Rodney Randolph, sir, and I am a lieutenant in the United States Navy, so tell me where we have met before."

"He replied at once:

"We have met before, Lieutenant Randolph, for I recognize your name and voice, though not your face, for it was dark when last we crossed each other's path," and he smiled.

"Instantly it flashed across me when I had met him, and I said quickly:

"This is the second time, sir, that I owe you my life, and the lives of those with me, for we last met at night, and in Africa, and you were then a captive of the Desert Man-Hunters."

"Ha! you have told me of that man, Randolph," said the captain.

"I have, sir."

"He turned you back from an expedition in to the interior, when you were hunting for a slave corral?"

"Yes, sir, and he was a captive, with several comrades who had been wrecked with him, of the Man-Hunters of the Desert."

"We arranged so as to have him escape, and the brig went to the rendezvous, but neither he nor his companions came, and we ran off after a slaver, which we lost."

"We returned to the coast and for days cruised about, hoping the captives could escape, and at last gave them up."

"And yet he did escape?"

"Yes, sir; he told me that he escaped with his companions in a slaver and returned to America."

"He is a gentleman, and is now captain of the trading-schooner which he owns."

"Well, I shall be most glad to meet him, and you must have him to dine with us to-morrow, for my thanks are due to him for saving the lives of my lieutenant and three of his men."

"I thank you, Captain Wingate, and I certainly feel most grateful to him, for this is the second time I owe my life to him," and the lieutenant seemed to feel deeply the debt of gratitude he was under to the commander of the schooner, who was, as the reader has discovered, none other than Basil Barton, the Buccaneer.

All arrangements for entertaining the guest on the day following were made that night, and it was decided that Rodney Randolph and several other officers should row over to the schooner the next morning and bring the skipper back with them.

But when the day dawned a man came on board from the shore bearing a note for Lieutenant Randolph.

It was from Basil Barton, and simply stated that he had heard of a chance to dispose of his cargo to a big advantage at another West Indian port, and so set sail at once.

A glance toward the anchorage of the schooner the day before showed that she was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SAILOR ON LEAVE.

SEVERAL months after the second meeting of Rodney Randolph with Basil Barton in the West Indies, the sloop-of-war to which the young officer was attached put into the harbor of Baltimore.

She had been upon a long cruise, and Lieutenant Randolph, who had been constantly on sea-duty for five years, bade his brother officers farewell, and having had a leave of absence granted him for several months, started upon his way to his home.

He was a Marylander and his home was upon the "eastern shore" of the Chesapeake, where his father owned a large plantation.

The sailing-packet had already departed for the little port near which was the plantation of Colonel Randolph, and, rather than wait for several days for the departure of the next one, Rodney Randolph determined to charter a small sloop to take him and his traps over to his home.

He secured a trim little vessel of twenty tons, with a negro crew, and loading her with the many souvenirs of other lands, gifts and curios which he had brought home with him, he set sail.

He had bright anticipations of his visit, for he had not seen his father and mother for long years.

Then there was his sister, a beautiful girl, when he left home, of fifteen, and whom he had left at the convent near Baltimore, to receive her education, when he was on his way to join his ship.

She had a friend, a sweet-faced girl of fourteen, then, but who had won the young sailor's heart, and he had made up his mind that she should one day become his wife.

In his regular letters to his sister he had never forgotten Luline Leslie, her sweet little schoolmate, and as regularly as a present came from him for Kate Randolph, it was always accompanied by one for his "girl's sweetheart."

"Kate has now grown to be a beautiful woman, I know, and Luline is also, I know, for how could she be otherwise?"

"And she must be nearly nineteen now, and

Kate twenty."

"How long I have been away!"

"And dear old father and mother!"

"Their hair was beginning to silver when I went away, and I guess they are beginning to feel their years."

"And the servants! how glad I will be to see them, and I am sure they will give a warm welcome to 'Mars' Rod.'

"Five long years have I been away."

"How much has transpired since then."

"And but for that gallant fellow, Barton, who should be captain of an armed deck, and not of a merchant schooner, pretty as his craft is, I would never again have crossed the threshold of my dear old home."

"What a career he has had, for he was for a long time a captive in Africa, escaped on a slaver, and is now commanding the prettiest craft afloat."

"What do I not owe him in gratitude?"

"I wish I had learned his whereabouts, for I would have sought him out."

"But I only know his name, and that his home is somewhere upon the Gulf Coast."

So mused Rodney Randolph, as he sat, from choice, at the tiller of the little sloop he had chartered, as it went skimming along over the waters of the Chesapeake Bay, wafted by a six-knot breeze.

The vessel started well and was not uncomfortable.

He had the cabin all to himself, and there was one of the crew, of three negroes, who was a good cook.

The city of Baltimore had been left miles astern, and night was not far away, and the young officer seemed to enjoy the scene, while his thoughts were of home and the happy surprise he would give those he loved.

"I shall reach home for dinner to-morrow, if the wind holds good."

"And such a dinner! after all my sea life, how I will enjoy old Auntie Cloe's good cooking."

And so his thoughts were constantly of home, and he was like a boy once more.

He saw the sweet face of Luline Leslie constantly rise before him.

He remembered her as a wee baby, then a pretty child, and then, as he last saw her, a maiden about to step across the threshold of womanhood.

He remembered her handsome home, where she, an only child, dwelt with her parents, whose idol she was.

The Leslie and Randolph plantations joined, and the two families were on the most intimate terms.

When last at home Kate and Luline had gone hunting with him, and they had passed days fishing in the streams together.

They had sailed with him on moonlight nights over the Chesapeake, and at other times dashed swiftly along well-mounted, following the hounds in chase of a fox or deer.

His old home, where his father had been born, and his father before him, he pictured, with its large piazzas and luxurious rooms.

Its lawns, flower-gardens, broad acres and the "negro quarters" all flitted before his mind, and he said aloud:

"Three long months of blissful joy in that Eden of home."

"Sail ho, massa!"

The cry broke in upon his reveries, and came from one of the negroes forward, he who was called the "cap'n" of the little sloop.

"Ay, ay, my man, I have had my eyes upon her for some time."

He had seen the vessel, and yet had taken no note of her.

Now, as his eyes fell upon her, at the call of the negro, he started, took a long look and said emphatically:

"It is the schooner of the man to whom I twice owe my life!"

"Now he shall not escape me."

"Come, lads, I wish to speak yonder craft," and the sloop was headed so as to cross the bows of the stranger.

The sailor eye of Rodney Randolph convinced him that there could be no mistake.

The stranger must be the schooner which he had seen half a year before in the little harbor in the West Indies, where he had so nearly lost his life.

"There cannot be two vessels so near alike," he said.

"No, there is the same sharp bow, sharp as a razor, the exceedingly long bowsprit, tall masts, raking far aft, and the wide space between them, which admits of that large fore-sail."

"Yes, as she goes about on that tack, I recognize her overhanging stern, and see her immense main-boom runs far out over the quarter, as his vessel's did."

"I studied that craft for hours as she lay at anchor in the harbor, little dreaming that I was to owe so much of gratitude to her skipper, and I cannot be mistaken; that is Captain Basil Barton's vessel."

He called to the negro "cap'n" to take the helm, and turned his glass upon the schooner.

"It is the very craft; but she looks badly used up."

"She certainly has been in action, for her sails are torn, and her bulwarks seamed with shot-marks."

"Ah! he has been chased by some pirate."

"Perhaps that curse of the sea, Basil, the Buccaneer."

"Oh, that I could catch that sea terror, my captaincy would be assured."

"I shall have to ask Captain Basil Barton to change his name, or with his saucy schooner he will have some of our cruisers suspecting him of being the famous buccaneer," and the lieutenant laughed at his own conceit, while he gave the helmsman an order to let her off a couple of points, as he wished to cross the bows of the schooner.

The latter vessel did indeed seem in a bad condition.

Her sails were worn, torn and weather-stained.

Her hull was scarred and her bulwarks shattered, and it did not take a sailor's eye to see that she had been under a hot fire.

As the sloop drew nearer the lieutenant took the little flag from the locker, fastened it upon the halyards and ran it up.

A moment he let it remain, and then three times dipped it in salute to the schooner.

Upon the latter vessel a large crew was visible, and to the surprise of the lieutenant he now saw that she was armed.

No flag had been floating over her decks, but in response to the salute of the lieutenant, up to the peak fluttered a flag.

"Ah! not American—red, white—Ha! it is the flag of Peru!"

"What can it mean?"

And as the young American spoke the flag was dipped three times in answer to his salute.

CHAPTER XL.

THE THIRD MEETING.

The schooner seemed inclined to continue on her course up to the town without further notice of the little sloop.

But Lieutenant Randolph continued to head so as to run as near her as possible, and as he approached kept his glass fixed upon her.

"There is my man, for there is not another like him, even though my brother officers said he resembled me somewhat."

"I consider it a compliment, for he certainly is a handsome-looking person and would win a woman's heart most readily."

"But what can his vessel be doing under the Peruvian colors, and he in the full uniform of a captain of the navy of Peru?"

"He seems inclined to avoid me, so I will hail."

Going forward, the lieutenant put his hands up to his mouth to the better throw the sound of his voice and hailed in stentorian tones:

"Ho, the schooner, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, the sloop!"

The answer came back in a deep voice that was distinctly heard.

"Is Captain Basil Barton on board?"

The lieutenant saw the officer in full uniform start and at once level his glass upon the sloop. He at once took off his cap and waved it.

Instantly came the command to lay the schooner to, and then followed:

"Ahoi, Lieutenant Randolph!"

"Come on board, won't you?"

"Ay, ay, sir," was the cheery answer.

Rodney Randolph was in his undress uniform and had been readily recognized by the captain of the schooner.

He at once gave the order to lay the sloop to, and was about to get the little boat into the water, when he saw that the schooner's gig had been already lowered with marvelous quickness and was pulling for the sloop.

"Captain Barton's compliments, sir, and he has sent this boat for you," said a dark-faced young officer, in middy's uniform and speaking with an accent that showed his foreign birth.

"I am ready, thank you, sir," was the reply, and entering the boat Rodney Randolph was soon alongside the schooner.

He was met at the gangway by her captain, and at once entered into the cabin.

Rodney Randolph seemed surprised.

He saw that the merchant craft he had been on board of in the West Indian port, had been transformed into a complete vessel-of-war.

She carried a most formidable battery of nine guns, three of them pivots, mounted forward, amidships and aft, and of large caliber, while there were three twelve-pounders to a broadside.

Her decks were in perfect condition, and her crew neat and under perfect discipline, for he was met with a salute.

But the craft had been badly handled in some action, that was certain, and needed repairs, a general overhauling and new sails.

He was led at once into the cabin, where he found every indication of a luxurious life on the part of the vessel's commander.

The captain met him in the full uniform of a commander in the Peruvian Navy, and said, as he warmly grasped his hand:

"I am happy to welcome you on board the Venus, a Peruvian schooner-of-war."

"I am happy in meeting you once more, Captain Barton—"

"Bartona now, sir, for I have Peruvianized my name into Basil Bartona."

"Ah! and how well the addition of the letter A makes it fit as a foreign name."

"But you ran off from port that night before I could prove my gratitude in some way, and our whole ship, from captain down, were disappointed, for all had combined to do you honor on the following day."

"They were very kind, señor—I beg pardon, I mean Lieutenant Randolph."

"But the truth was that I was even then carrying a cargo of arms and munitions of war to Peru, and had put into port for a supply of fresh water, as our casks had bursted."

"I was fearful of being taken, so hastened away."

"And you are in the service of Peru now, Captain Barton?"

"A, lieutenant, you forget the a—Bartona," said Basil Barton, with a smile.

"Ah, yes, I will have to call you so, I expect."

"Yes, I am a Peruvian now, for my vessel I entered into the service of that country, in her present struggle."

"I like it better than being skipper of a merchant craft."

"Your nature implies that you should."

"But you have been in action of late, I see?"

"Several times, lieutenant, and as there were no good yards in Peru, where I could completely refit, I came to America, and am now on my way to Baltimore, where my vessel was built."

"I only hope I can command just such a craft, some day."

"Who was your architect, Captain Bartona?"

"I am the architect of my own vessel, sir, as of my own fortunes; but Latrobe & Claiborne of Baltimore were her builders."

"I shall remember them, for I may have a craft built some day, and I would like to copy your model."

"Willingly, sir; but now tell me how I find you in command of a sloop with a sable crew?"

Rodney Randolph laughed and said:

"My home is upon the eastern shore of Maryland, my father being a planter there, and as I have a three months' leave, I am going thither to spend the time, and there you must come and visit me, while your ship is fitting out, for I will not take no for an answer."

"You are most kind, Lieutenant Randolph; but I shall be quite busy."

"You must throw business, like physic to the dogs, for I have a father, mother and sister who will give you welcome from their inmost hearts, and be only too glad to prove their gratitude to one who has saved their home from mourning."

"I have not forgotten our first meeting, Captain Bartona, upon the coast of Africa, when you turned me back from certain death."

"I have not forgotten that though you could have saved yourself by returning with me, you would not leave your fellow-captives in cruel captivity."

"I have not forgotten that you, the commander of a vessel, set your men the example of humanity, by springing into the sea that day in the West Indies and snatching me from death."

"Now, knowing all that I owe to you, I will not allow you to escape me, without meeting those who love me and becoming a guest at Randolph Range, as our plantation is called."

"I cannot be deaf to such a generous invitation, Lieutenant Randolph, and I promise you that I will stop at your home on my way to sea again."

"No, that won't do, for that will mean but an anchorage of a day."

"You can get your workmen at work on your vessel, give all orders necessary, leave your senior lieutenant to oversee the fitting out, and then come down to Randolph Range for a few weeks."

"I have a sister, as I said, and there is one to me on the neighboring plantation who is not a sister, and so you see we will form a quartette that will devote the time to hunting, fishing, sailing and other enjoyments."

"Now, you see, I have it all arranged."

"I will do as you ask, lieutenant."

"I cannot refuse you, and you may expect me at an early day."

"It has been a long time since I entered an American home."

"Once I had a happy home myself, and those who loved me."

"But the sea is my home now, those who loved me have passed away, and I sail under a foreign flag."

He spoke in a tone of sadness, and Rodney Randolph was touched by his words.

Soon after the steward of the schooner served supper, and the young American officer was surprised to see that the service was all of solid silver.

"You live like a prince, Captain Bartona, and it is in strange contrast with our plain life aboard an American vessel-of-war."

"Why, your cabin might well be mistaken for a Persian harem or the quarters of a Moorish

prince," and Rodney Randolph gazed about him admiringly at the superb furnishing of the cabin.

The carpet was of the finest Eastern manufacture, rare rugs were scattered about, silk and velvet divans invited repose, tables and easy-chairs of richly carved woods were there in abundance, and the lamps were worth a king's ransom, and as darkness had come on, were now lighted and shed a golden radiance over all.

The sides of the cabin were hung with arms of various nations, costly cutmeters, yatagans with gemmed hilts, gold-mounted pistols and splendid swords of finest Damascus steel.

There were flags of various nations drooped here and there in artistic manner, rare paintings in costly frames, and in fact the cabin was fit to be the abiding-place of the favorite of a Persian prince.

The wines were old, rare and of delicious flavor, and the edibles were luscious and served in the most tempting manner.

"I carry my life in my hand, Lieutenant Randolph, and so am prepared to make the most of it.

"*Dum vivimus vivamus* is my motto, and I live up to it in its strictest meaning.

"This vessel is the only home I have, and so I make myself contented with the means I possess, which are ample, as I am not a poor man.

"This vessel is my own, her armament and all, and the flag alone is Peru's."

Rodney Randolph was more than ever pleased with his strange host, and several hours passed away in pleasant converse with him, for each time that he started to take his departure, he was urged to remain longer.

At last he forced himself to say farewell, gave his instructions as to how Captain Bartona should find Randolph Range plantation, and departed for his sloop, being treated to the last with the greatest honor.

Arriving on board the sloop, he found his "cap'n" and crew "half-seas over," for they had not been forgotten in the hospitalities extended to him, and the rare old wine which had been sent they had imbibed most generously, for a generous quantity had been sent to them.

"Lordy, Massa Lufstenan', dat must be a pirit or a king, I reckons, from de way he feeds us poor niggers.

"Why, we has had a feed as will las' us a mighty long time, sah, and delicker were just like melted gold."

Rodney Randolph laughed at the "cap'n's" report of the feast they had and felt that he could himself appreciate the hospitality of the commander of the Sea Venus.

"Well, I shall be most happy to return his hospitality, and if my pretty sister don't fall in love with him, then she is not the romantic girl she was when I saw her last.

"Now, lads, get the sloop under way," and so saying, the young sailor again took his place at the helm, while he watched the schooner gliding away on her course to the city.

CHAPTER XLI.

A GUEST AT RANDOLPH RANGE.

The reader doubtless understands that the meeting of Basil Barton under the flag of Peru was no sign of his reformation.

He was as cunning as he was daring and brave, and he had decided to make a tool of the Peruvian Government, then at war, to protect himself.

He had therefore gone to that country with his vessel and volunteered as a captain, offering his schooner and his own services, with his crew, for the protection of the flag.

Papers had been accordingly given him such as he desired, and yet he only used them in cases of need, for his piracies still continued upon the high seas.

He had been in a severe action with an English brig-of-war which he had mistaken for a merchant vessel in the night, and though he escaped from her, his schooner had been pretty severely handled.

He had been out from port for some time and needed a complete refitting, so had boldly determined to go to Baltimore and place his vessel in the hands of her builders for a thorough overhauling and some improvements he desired made.

His meeting with Lieutenant Randolph had caused him to decide to make a visit, as urged, to Randolph Range, and having placed his vessel in charge of the builders, with promise of double pay if he could receive her within a month, he dismissed his crew for a run ashore, and one afternoon, as Rodney Randolph had done, chartered a little smack for the run to the eastern shore.

By good luck he hit upon the very craft which had carried the young officer across the Chesapeake, and he was recognized by the negro "cap'n" and his crew of two men as the "pirit" or "king" who had so sumptuously feasted them with "wine like melted gold."

The smack was at once put in the best condition for a guest, stores were sent on board by Basil Barton, and with a number of rare and costly presents for those at Randolph Range,

the results of his piracies, the outlaw set forth upon his voyage across the beautiful Chesapeake.

It was toward the close of a lovely day, forty-eight hours after leaving Baltimore, when the sloop, carrying a passenger so fateful, came in sight of the plantation home of Rodney Randolph.

"Dere's de place, Massa Cap'n," said the black skipper, pointing out the white mansion glimmering through a park of fine oaks.

It was a beautiful place, with grounds sloping down to the edge of the little basin, or cove, which was called the Harbor, and about it were flower-gardens, lawns and many rustic arbors inviting repose.

The mansion was large, rambling and almost encircled by verandas, while a beautiful beach of sand wound for miles along the shore as a framing to the homelike picture.

Suddenly there came into view, dashing swiftly along a lane toward the road that wound up to the mansion, a party on horseback.

It was a gentleman and two ladies, and they all sat their horses with the ease of those who are reared in the saddle.

They halted as the lane turned in from the fields to the carriage-drive, and their gaze fell at once upon the little sloop.

The course that she was steering, showed that the Plantation Harbor was her point of destination, and as the eyes of the ladies' escort fell upon the sloop, he cried in a joyful tone:

"There comes my Peruvian captain, for I recognize the sloop I came over in, and there he stands at the helm."

It was Lieutenant Randolph, and taking off his hat he waved it, while he hailed in his splendid voice:

"Don Bartona, ahoy!"

The pirate had seen the horseback party come out of the lane and halt, and he at once recognized the handsome young sailor.

"It is the lieutenant and his sister, with that other fair lady of whom he spoke, doubtless."

"They all ride splendidly."

"Ah! he hails!"

"Ahoy, Lieutenant Randolph!" came back in the mellow tones of the pirate.

"What a superb voice!" said Kate Randolph, who was a beautiful girl with splendid black eyes, and a tall, exquisite form.

"Yes, he has just the voice for a hero," added Luline Leslie, a lovely blonde, who was equally of as perfect a form as the other.

"And the face and bearing of a hero too, girls, as you will say when you meet him."

"But there is that in his face which I cannot understand, and I wish you to read it for me," and raising his voice Rodney Randolph called out:

"Thrice welcome you are, my dear friend."

"Head for the pier and we will meet you there."

"Ay, ay, sir," promptly came the response, and the party on horseback rode on, while the sloop glided along on her course toward the Harbor.

She was yet a mile away, and as she sped along the buccaneer left the helm to one of the crew and stood with folded arms watching the riders.

"Both have exquisite forms, and their seat in the saddle is perfect."

"They doubtless have handsome faces, for all the fair Marylanders, I have heard, are lovely."

"Well, we will see which I prefer, for I am heart-free since I hanged that revengeful Cuban girl and buried poor Celeste."

With this heartless remark the red-handed outlaw calmly surveyed the scenery along the shore, and admired the lovely home of Randolph Range.

Two miles away, in the distance, another plantation mansion was visible, equally as imposing as was the Randolph manor, and he rightly supposed that there dwelt Luline Leslie, she who had won the heart of the young naval officer.

In the distance also, like two little villages, were the "quarters" of the slaves of the two plantations, and far away over the tree-tops a spire was visible, where the country church was situated, surrounded by its dead.

Altogether it was a homelike, lovely picture, such a scene as might make a wicked man long to give up the evil life he had led and there seek oblivion from the world and atonement for the past.

Were such the thoughts in the brain of Basil Barton, he who was going into a fold where all was peace and joy, a wolf among lambs?

Perhaps, for his stern, strangely fascinating face had softened, and the lines about the mouth were less hard, for memory was welling up from his heart, which conscience was piercing with its relentless, double-edged daggers.

A few moments more and the sloop glided alongside of the little pier, and springing out the hand of Basil Barton was grasped by the man who owed him his life.

The three had dismounted, and a negro had been called to lead the horses to the stables, while the maidens awaited to welcome the guest of Rodney Randolph.

"Oh! what a splendid-looking man," whispered Luline Leslie.

"A man to love, a man to fear," was Kate Randolph's response, and then she stepped forward with ungloved hand, as her brother presented:

"Captain Basila Bartona, of the Peruvian Navy, and my friend."

Luline Leslie also extended her ungloved hand, as she was introduced by Rodney Randolph, and the four walked slowly toward the mansion.

There, upon the piazza awaited Colonel Randolph and his wife to welcome their son's friend, and the voice of the old soldier trembled as he told him how glad he was to greet one to whom his son owed his life.

The mother's eyes filled with tears as she greeted him, and she said in her sweet way:

"As Rod has told us that you have no home, no parents, you must consider us your parents, and this your home to come to whenever you will do so."

Such was the welcome of the false-hearted Basil Barton as a guest at Randolph Range.

CHAPTER XLII.

BAD NEWS.

The days glided swiftly by at Randolph Range, and Basil Barton had been persuaded to extend his visit to four weeks, where he had only intended to remain for one-fourth that time.

His elegant presents had made the family most anxious to reciprocate in some way, while they felt they never could repay the debt of gratitude they owed him as the rescuer of Rodney Randolph from death.

Against all protest Basil Barton had kept the little sloop with her negro crew awaiting him, and the cap'n and his two men had enjoyed a lazy time of it, though once they had been sent up to town with a letter to the schooner's lieutenant.

The reply seemed to be satisfactory, for Basil Barton ling red on.

He was a man who had strangely winning manners, when he so wished.

Ever courtly, he had won the hearts of the old people by his attention to them.

Dignified, and a brilliant conversationalist, he entertained all by his stories of travels, and yet he seemed never to speak of himself, unless compelled to do so.

His life as a supposed prisoner in Africa he had been forced by the inquiries of both Kate and Luline to tell about, and his glib tongue made a very pathetic and romantic story of it.

Yet his face was a mask which none had yet read.

They admired him, and yet he seemed to impress all with a certain awe.

"The man has a history," Colonel Randolph had said to his son, and this seemed to voice the opinion of all.

He rode like a centaur, was a fine driver, possessed an excellent voice in song, and played the mandolin and Spanish guitar.

The mystery that hung over him but added zest to his charm, for little had he to say of his early life.

But such a thing as a suspicion of him no one had the shadow of.

"You will come by, if only for a day, Captain Bartona, when you sail in your schooner," Kate Randolph had said.

"Yes, I shall come by to bid you farewell, as I go again to my duties upon the sea."

"But, be my life what it may in the future, I can never forget this Eden of happiness," he said with feeling.

"You must never come near this coast, Captain Bartona, without making us a visit," Mrs. Randolph had urged.

"No, this is your home, captain," the colonel said.

"What is the name of your schooner, Captain Bartona?" asked Luline Leslie, who spent about half of her time at Randolph Range, and Kate the other half with her.

"The Sea Venus, Miss Luline."

"What a pretty name!"

"There was a noted slaver of that same name some years ago," the colonel said.

"Yes, a Cuban slaver, and we chased her several times and she always got away from us, for her speed was something phenomenal."

"Did you ever see her in your wanderings, Bartona?" asked Rodney Randolph.

"I got my name from her, for it was that vessel which I escaped from Africa in," was the reply.

"Indeed! and what became of her, or do you know?"

"My comrades and myself left her on the Cuban coast, and it was said that her commander scuttled his ship with all on board."

"Tell me of her commander, Bartona, for he certainly was a most daring and skillful man."

"He was said to be a Spaniard, Mexican or Cuban."

"A man of striking appearance, very handsome, cruel as the grave, and a perfect sea-man."

"He treated us well when we were with him

on board, after escaping from our cruel masters, the Man-Hunters, and I rather liked him."

"Do you think he scuttled his vessel?"

"Yes, for he was just the man to do so, and certain it is that the Sea Venus as a slaver was never seen again upon the seas," and no one could have believed that Basil Barton had been aught to Andrea Do Costa, the slaver, from his words and men.

At last the day came when he was compelled to depart, and sad farewells were said, and the little sloop headed out of the harbor on her way to Baltimore.

He was greatly missed after his departure, and Rodney Randolph saw that he carried with him the love of his beautiful sister Kate, though not a word had been spoken to her of her having won his heart.

Luline also seemed blue after the departure of her lover's guest, and a shadow appeared to be hovering over the household.

Several days after the packet vessel that plied between a little town on the eastern shore and Baltimore brought a paper which contained a piece of startling intelligence.

Colonel Randolph read the head-lines as they were at dinner that day and hastily handed it to his son.

"Read it aloud, brother," urged Kate, earnestly, while Luline, who was present, glanced up nervously.

"It is about Bartona, so I will do so," said Rodney Randolph, and he read aloud as follows:

"DUELS TO THE DEATH!

"A PERUVIAN, NOT A PIRATE!

"THE COURAGE OF HIS OPINIONS!

"An Insult and the Result!

"DON BARTONA, A PERUVIAN CAPTAIN, AND ENGLISH NAVAL OFFICERS MEET ON THE FIELD OF HONOR!

"We are able to place before our readers the full particulars of the fatal duel fought by a Peruvian naval officer now fitting out his vessel in our port and two English lieutenants on board the British vessel-of-war Sea Sovereign now at anchor off the city.

"It seems that Don Bartona commands a schooner-of-war sailing under the colors of Peru and duly commissioned as a privateer.

"Some two months ago the British ship-of-war, a large brig, ran upon the Peruvian cruiser in the night, and supposing her to be the pirate craft of Basil, the Buccaneer, opened fire and attempted her capture.

"The Peruvian, however, would not make the mistake known to the officer, and returned his fire with such right good will that he beat his enemy off, though much smaller than his adversary.

"When day dawned the brig chased the schooner, but the latter outsailed her and dropped her out of sight.

"Entering the port of Baltimore, the Peruvian has had his vessel undergoing repairs the month past, and she is now all ready for sea and at anchor off the town.

"The British vessel Sea Sovereign ran into port yesterday and the officers recognized their old foe, but quickly learned that she was no pirate, but a privateer under Peruvian colors.

"Don Bartona was stopping at the hotel, when the British officers went to dine yesterday, and the conversation turned upon the craft from Peru.

"The Don was of course not known to the British officers, and not being in uniform heard their conversation in silence, until a lieutenant made the remark that a volunteer naval officer in the service of Peru was simply a privateer, and that such a craft was really a pirate.

"Don Bartona arose at this, and, as the English officers had been looking at him, doubtless struck by his splendid appearance, he supposed that they knew who he was and had purposely uttered the insulting words.

"Approaching the end of the table where they sat, he said with marked courtesy of manner:

"Señor, I accept your insulting words as you intend them, and if you are not a coward, you will at least give me the satisfaction one gentleman has a right to demand of another."

Not a sound broke the silence as Rodney Randolph paused in his reading, and glancing up from the paper he saw that both Kate and Luline were as pale as death.

"This is unfortunate, that I should not have seen this paper before it came in, as it bears news of such import," said Rodney Randolph.

"Is he dead?" asked Kate, speaking almost in a whisper.

"Yes, read on, my son, and let us at once know the worst.

"It was a blunder on my part to read the first lines out, the colonel said, and Rodney Randolph at once resumed reading the story which held such deep interest for all present.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE DOUBLE DUEL.

CONTINUING reading from the paper before him, Rodney Randolph's words were listened to with breathless attention.

What he read was as follows:

"The English officers were amazed to be thus faced by the man of whom they had been speaking; but having offered the insult they were determined to abide the result, and the lieutenant who had had the word 'Coward' flung in his teeth by the Peruvian, at once sent a brother officer to arrange a meeting with the Don.

"The friend found the Peruvian in his room, calmly smoking and chatting with one of the officers of his ship, to whom it seems, he had not even mentioned the occurrence at the dinner-table.

"He received the British officer with marked courtesy, and more as a command than request, turned to his lieutenant and said:

"Señor Alfrida, I have gotten into a trifling affair with the friend of this gentleman, and you must act for me."

"The Peruvian lieutenant bowed and at once asked the Englishman in what way he could serve him.

"He was soon told and a meeting was arranged for the next day—yesterday—at a point on the Chesapeake shore below Fort McHenry.

"The Don seemed to be utterly indifferent as to the choice of weapons, and swords were selected, with pistols to fall back upon in case of a second meeting being demanded.

"The English officers then returned on board their vessel, while the Don and his lieutenant attended the theater and seemed much pleased with the play, and no one who saw him there dreamed that he was on the eve of a fatal duel.

"The next morning the two parties rowed to the spot where the duel was to be fought in their boats, the Don being first upon the field.

"His second was an exceedingly young man for a lieutenant, and would appear like a middy in the American service.

"But the handsome little fellow understood well his duties, and he soon arranged with the British second the preliminaries.

"Besides the English lieutenant, who was to meet the Peruvian, there was another lieutenant and a surgeon.

"There was blood in the eyes of the Englishmen, and they were mad clean through, for they were sore at being beaten off by the schooner, and at the daring of the Don to resent their words.

"The Don, on the contrary, was more than cool.

"He was actually indifferent, to judge from his face, and seemed more interested in his cigar and the scenery, than in the affair on hand.

"At least, it so appeared to the representative of our paper, who had gotten wind of the affair and place of meeting, and was hiding in some bushes only a few paces distant from the duelists.

"The preliminaries were arranged with dispatch, the principals took their stand, and the swords crossed.

"Almost instantly the Englishman's blade was sent flying into the air over his head, and as it came down it was cleverly caught by the Peruvian, who, grasping the blade, held out to the Englishman the hilt with the quiet remark:

"Accept your sword, señor, and your life at the hands of a man whom you consider no better than a pirate."

"The British officer was bewildered, for he was a noted swordsman, we learn, and his companions seemed equally at a loss to understand what had happened.

"With his generous act the Don bowed and was turning away, when the English officer lost his temper and said fiercely:

"And pirate you must be, for no honest man could handle a blade as you do."

"The Don instantly returned with the remark:

"The señor is not satisfied?"

"No!"

"I am at the señor's service."

"That settled it and another meeting was arranged, this time with pistols at ten paces.

"The Don had come prepared, and his weapons were selected, were carefully loaded, the ground was stepped off and the English lieutenant acting as second won the word to fire.

"It was given promptly, and but one weapon flashed, for the Don's quickness sent a bullet into the very center of the Englishman's forehead ere he could pull trigger.

"He fell in his tracks, and the Don raising his cap was again turning away, when the English second, enraged at the death of his brother officer, shouted out fiercely:

"You have killed him, you accursed murderer."

"The Don wheeled as though on parade, walked quickly toward his insulter and said with a dangerous light in his fine eyes:

"Dare you back up your words, Señor Englishman, with your sword?"

"Ay, ay, I dare," was the plucky response.

"Señor Alfrida, this brings more work upon you," said the Don.

"The surgeon, who had been bending over the dead officer, now had to act as second in this other meeting.

"He seemed to have a cool head and good impulses, for he said reproachfully:

"Nixon, you were wrong, for the affair re-

flected honor on Don Bartona only, as he just gave poor Lieutenant Bancroft his life."

"If you care not to serve me, Surgeon Porter, I will seek another friend," was the retort.

"Oh, no, I will serve you, Lieutenant Nixon, now, for we have no right to bring Don Bartona again upon the field, when his second has said he wished to sail to-day."

"The second meeting was at once arranged, and swords were chosen.

"The blades crossed, and, but for the generosity of the Don the Sea Sovereign would have had to mourn the death of two of her officers, for he disarmed the lieutenant as quickly as he had his brother officer, but sent his sword flying through the air and it nearly spitted our representative hiding in the bushes."

"Señor Englishman," said the Don, "I leave you a reminder of me, for I care not to take your life," and he drew his sword from the arm of the Englishman, through which he had driven it almost to the hilt.

"A moment more and the two Peruvians had walked away to the boat, leaving the British surgeon with one dead and one wounded officer upon his hands.

"Our representative, having obtained full particulars, could afford to be useful, so he at once stepped out of the bushes and offered his services to the surgeon, who gladly accepted them.

"The crew of the boat were already coming, for the Don had, in his courteous way of doing things, sent them to the spot, remarking, so the seamen said:

"Coxswain, over yonder at the foot of that tall tree, your officers are awaiting you, and you had better carry your oars to use as a litter, as there will be a dead boy to bring back."

"Having accompanied the surgeon to his boat, our representative went after his horse, which he had hitched some distance off and returned to the city, where he went in search of the Don, to learn what facts of interest that he could from him as to the war in Peru.

"But the Don had left his hotel, and his beautiful cruiser was already gliding down the harbor, her flag at half mast as she passed the Sea Sovereign, out of respect for the dead officer, a mark of respect, we must say, on the part of Don Bartona, we have never heard equalled."

"Had his vessel remained in port, we do not doubt but that the Peruvian Don would have shown his sympathy for the officers and men of the Sea Sovereign, by attending the funeral of the man he had slain."

"Just like him, and I say bravo for Bartona!" cried Rodney Randolph when he ceased reading.

But he quickly turned to Kate, whose head had dropped into her hands, and unable to control her emotion, her joy at Captain Bartona's escape, she burst into tears.

"Why, sis, what is the matter?"

Just then a negro ran up to the window that looked out upon the lawn, and cried:

"Mars' Rod', dar's a big war-ship a-comin', sah!"

All sprung to their feet, and great was the relief of the interruption to Kate, while at one glance Rodney Randolph recognized the vessel and cried:

"The Sea Venus! by the gods of war!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

ONCE MORE AFLAFT

IT was the Sea Venus—as Basil Barton had chosen to call his schooner Spiteful, as he had himself Don Basila Bartona—which was seen coming over the waters toward the little harbor of Randolph Range.

While sailing about on the adjacent waters, the buccaneer had well studied them, and now ran his beautiful vessel in toward the shore without a pilot.

From keel to truck the schooner had been overhauled, and many improvements had been made upon her.

Her topmasts had been lengthened, and even her remarkably long main boom and bowsprit had been increased in length, until her spread of canvas was simply enormous.

Her bulwarks had been raised half a foot in height, the sails and rigging were new, and everything that she could set was spread to catch the breeze, which caused her to look like a huge white cloud floating upon the waters.

The hull was painted jet-black, and about it ran a ribbon of red, while as a figure-head there was a band of crimson, the index finger pointing out the course ahead.

The crew were in a neat new uniform, the guns shone like burnished gold, and the wicked commander, and his two young officers, who were both Peruvians, were resplendent in gaudy uniforms.

As though glad to show his beautiful vessel off to his friends, Buccaneer Basil held her on under full sail, and she was swiftly gliding through the waters, though but a four-knot breeze was blowing.

As she entered the little harbor, the nimble crew began to take in sail, and when she rounded to to drop anchor, the last bit of canvas came down with a run, presenting a most beau-

tiful sight, and causing Rodney Randolph to cry out:

"I never saw anything more beautifully done."

"He is a splendid sailor, is Basila Bartona."

"Now let us meet him."

Even the colonel and his wife joined the others in their walk down to the end of the pier to meet the buccaneer, who was coming ashore in his boat, and Mrs. Randolph, with sympathy for him, said in a low tone:

"He does not think we know of that fearful duel, so do not let us speak of it unless he does."

Then the buccaneer landed and warm was the greeting given him.

His face wore no shadow, from the deadly scene he had passed through, and he spoke in the same fascinating manner that seemed natural to him.

Up to the mansion they went, and all took seats upon the piazza, where the buccaneer picked up the paper which Rodney Randolph had thrown down when going to meet his friend.

"Ah, you have the paper of yesterday, I see.

"May I ask if it contains a notice of an affair which it was my misfortune to be a participant in?"

All looked at each other and then at Rodney, who said, quickly:

"Yes, Bartona; I had just finished reading an account of your affair with the British officers when your vessel was sighted."

"Here it is, so see if it is about correct."

All eyes were upon the buccaneer as he glanced down the headlines and then through the article.

Not a muscle of his face changed, for it was as though carved in bronze.

"Yes, it is more nearly correct than such reports usually are," and, turning to Mrs. Randolph, he continued:

"My dear madam, I hope I have not fallen from grace in your eyes by this unfortunate occurrence; but it was an affair not of my seeking, nor could I avoid it with honor to myself."

"I regret the necessity, Captain Bartona, for dueling, but I must say, in this affair you cannot be censured," was the reply.

"I thank you, madam," and, as if ignoring the matter further, he turned to other topics and stated that he wished them all to dine with him on board his vessel the next day, as he should then have to sail.

"I have been a long time idle, and must be cruising; but I wish you to see my ocean home," he said, with a smile.

The next day all went on board the schooner to dinner, and the two maidens were in raptures over the beauty of the cabin, and many a pretty souvenir of their visit did they receive.

"Here, Rodney, I wish to ask your acceptance of this sword and belt," he said, handing to the lieutenant a superb blade with a hilt that was set in precious stones.

Each and all received a reminder of their dining on board the Sea Venus, and as the sun neared the horizon farewells were said and the guests departed, Mrs. Randolph remarking:

"Remember, your home is here, Captain Bartona, whenever you care to come to it."

Then the well-trained crew set sail, got up the anchor, and bending gracefully to the breeze, the beautiful schooner, whose master was certainly a chevalier corsair, with all of his crimes, went flying away like a race-horse to again redder her decks with human blood, to again flaunt her sable flag upon the seas, and to add still greater dread and infamy to the name of Basil, the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SPECTER BETWEEN THEM.

BACK to his vessel went Rodney Randolph, when the three months' leave was up.

His face wore not the happy look which it had when he had gone home, for a shadow was upon it.

That shadow had been brought there because his bright anticipations had not been wholly realized, as to winning the love of Luline Leslie.

When he returned home he felt that she did love him, and he was happy.

Then it seemed that a shadow fell between them.

What that shadow was he did not know.

Ever kind to him, she yet seemed not to feel the joy in his presence that she once had.

He tried to reason over the matter, and could find no solution, and so he went to his sister about it.

"Why, Rod, Luline is no longer a child, but a woman, and she must hide her feelings now."

"You have never told her in words that you loved her, and yet she cannot but have seen it, and she is shy, fearing to do that which she should not."

Such was Kate's explanation.

"Then you think I should ask her for her love?"

"Yes, if you love her."

"God knows that I do, Kate, and it would kill me, strong man that I am, I verily believe, to lose her."

"Then tell her of your love and ask her to be your wife, Rod."

"I will; but I'll wait until just before I go, for, as I am to be stationed at Boston for a year now, I can get a chance to come home and marry her, when she is willing to do so."

Such was Rodney Randolph's decision, and the day before the one set for his departure, he asked Luline to take a row with him upon the waters.

There was almost a dead calm, the sun was setting in a piled-up mass of gold and crimson, and all nature seemed at rest.

She accepted the invitation, and soon Rodney Randolph was lazily rowing over the waters, silvered by the last rays of the setting sun.

"Luline."

"Well, Rod?"

"Do you know why I asked you to come out for a row with me?"

"To enjoy the sunset from the water, I suppose."

"There was another reason."

She drummed nervously with her hand upon the gunwale of the boat, and remained silent.

"Don't you wish to know?"

"If you wish to tell me."

"It was to tell you that which you already know."

"Why tell it, then?" she said, almost impatiently.

"It was to tell you, Luline, that since I held you in my arms, as a wee baby, when I, as a boy of twelve went over to your home to see the little stranger that your father told me was there, I loved you."

"When you grew into a beautiful child of three years and called me Wod, I loved you the more."

"When you were a girl of nine, you became my little sweetheart, and as you grew into maid-hood I felt that I could never regard another as I did you."

"You have been in my thoughts by day, my dreams by night, and every bright anticipation of my life has had you as the foundation."

"I have thought of you in calms, I have had you with me in memory when fierce storms have driven my vessel, and I dreaded the end might come and I never see you more."

"I came home and I found you more beautiful than I had painted you in my mind's eye, and around my heart you have twined yourself so that to break the chain would be to blast my life."

"I love you, Luline, and I ask you to be my wife."

"Now you know why I asked you to come with me here upon the water."

Her face was pale now, and he saw tears steal forth from beneath the long lashes.

Her lips quivered, and she seemed to be trying to control her emotion.

At last she said, and her voice was low and earnest:

"God bless you, Rodney Randolph, and guard you, will ever be my prayer; but, oh! do not ask me now to answer you."

"Wait until you come again."

"Then you shall have my answer."

"I shall hope, Luline."

"No, hope nothing; and yet I would not bid you not to hope."

"Only wait, Rod; wait until we meet again, and then you shall have my answer."

"I can only wait, Luline; but I will hope, for without the hope of your love some day I would be in despair."

"Shall we return now?"

"Yes."

No other word was spoken, and when he escorted her home that night, for she would not remain, and they walked along the highway in the moonlight, she turned at the door to say farewell.

She saw that his handsome face was sad, very sad, and knowing all that he was, a noble man, she said:

"Good-by, Rod; kiss me!"

He almost started at her words, but she threw her arms about his neck, kissed him and was gone.

And yet, as he walked back home in the moonlight, the shadow upon his heart seemed to deepen, and when he turned his back upon the old plantation, to return to his duties as an officer, he felt that some grim specter stood between Luline Leslie and himself.

Not once did he have a suspicion of the truth, not once did that grim specter resolve itself into the handsome face and form of the man he loved as a brother, the man to whom he twice owed his life, the cold, cynical, fascinating fiend in the form of man, Basil the Buccaneer.

CHAPTER XLV.

WITHOUT MERCY.

MONTHS passed away, after the departure of the Sea Venus, and the return of Rodney Randolph to go back to his vessel, which was to be stationed at Boston.

Letters came from him as before, but not as before were they filled with messages to Luline Leslie.

There was always "my love to Luline" in them, but no more.

He had told her he would wait for her answer, and he meant to do so, and not a word would he say to prejudice him in her favor for good or bad.

At Randolph Range matters went about as usual, though the colonel and his good wife could not but see that there was not the same happy spirit in Kate and Luline that there had been.

Perhaps the mother guessed the secret, but she kept it locked within her own bosom if she did.

The two maidens were seated in the arbor one afternoon, when a sail came rapidly up the bay.

It was a schooner, and they knew that but one vessel which they had ever seen in those waters carried that vast spread of canvas.

They looked for a long time at the schooner without speaking and then their eyes met.

"It is the Sea Venus," and the face of Kate Randolph turned crimson as she spoke.

"Yes, it is Captain Bartona's vessel," answered Luline, and she shaded her face with her hands, as though to get a better view of the schooner.

On the vessel came at a speed that would soon bring her to an anchorage in the Harbor.

She did not look as trim as she had when she departed, for her hull was weather-worn, her sails patched and there were other indications that she had been in several hot engagements.

Upon the quarter-deck stood Basil Barton, and his glass was searching the shores.

Soon it rested upon the maidens in the little arbor, and he raised his hat politely, and they waved their handkerchiefs in response.

A word to an officer then he spoke, and the flag of Peru, which floated at the peak, was dipped in salute.

Half an hour after he stepped out upon the pier, and Colonel Randolph was there to meet him.

"And Lieutenant Rodney?" asked the pirate, as the two walked together toward the mansion.

"Has gone back to his vessel, which is stationed at Boston, as you know he expected it to be."

"And your wife and Miss Kate?"

"Are well and waiting to welcome you."

"I hope Miss Luline is also well?"

"Oh, yes, and was here when your vessel was sighted, but had to return home, she said."

The colonel did not see the buccaneer frown at this piece of information.

They had now reached the mansion, and Mrs. Randolph and Kate came forward to greet him.

He told of his cruise, spoke indifferently of several engagements he had had, and said that he could remain but a few days, as he must again to sea.

As Luline did not come over to the Range, the next morning, Captain Bartona, as he was still called, said he would go over and pay his respects to her.

The parents of Luline were away from home, the negro butler said, on a visit for the day; but Miss Luline was in the arbor on the shore.

Thither he went.

Luline was seated there in silent meditation.

She heard not his approach, for he advanced with catlike tread, and stood gazing into the little window just behind her.

Moved by some thought that flashed through her mind, she stamped her little foot impatiently, and then from her lips broke the words:

"Oh! why did he come back here, just as I had made up my mind to forget him, and to become the wife of Rodney Randolph."

"I could bury my secret in my heart, and no one would ever suspect, and I alone would be the one to suffer, for I would make Rodney happy, and he would love and marry Kate, and she would be so happy."

"As it is, if he does not, poor Kate's heart will break, I fear, for she loves him to idolatry almost."

"And yet she does not love him more than I do."

"God bless you, Luline, for those words!"

She uttered a cry of alarm, and seemed almost about to swoon away with the emotion that rushed upon her.

But he sprung into the arbor and caught her in his arms.

She struggled to free herself, and, as he did not release her, she pillow'd her head upon his heart and burst into tears.

He had heard her words, she had betrayed her secret to him, and she was almost overwhelmed.

"And you welcome me with tears, my poor little frightened girl?" he said softly.

She still sobbed on.

"There, do not spoil these pretty eyes with tears, but look up into my face and tell me again what you said a moment ago."

"Tell me if you heard your words which I overheard?"

"It has been said that eavesdroppers hear no good of themselves, but I certainly am to-day an exception to the rule."

"Tell me, do you really love me, Luline, my beautiful child?"

"Yes."

She spoke the word almost fiercely.

Then she raised her head and looked him squarely in the face.

"I will not utter a falsehood, and now say that I do not love you, that I do not mean what I said.

"I do love you, and I loved you the moment I saw you.

"But I hid my love from every eye, and I meant to keep it hidden.

"Before Rodney Randolph left home, he asked me to love him, to become his wife.

"I told him to wait, and I would give him my answer upon our next meeting.

"I meant to subdue my love for you, and to accept him, for he is a man whom unrequited love kills or drives mad.

"I had loved him too, since my girlhood.

"Well, he departed, and I set about my task of conquering my love for you.

"I had another motive too, and I tell it in all kindness.

"It was because I had seen that you were loved by Kate Randolph.

"She loves you with her whole soul, heart and being.

"She is as noble as a woman as her brother is as a man, and if I, by sacrificing self, could make her happy, could make Rodney happy, I felt that you would be with Kate Randolph for a wife.

"I had laid my plans, and to-day I was going over to the Range, and carry out my good resolves.

"But see, you came upon me unawares.

"Never take a woman unawares, for you know not what may happen.

"In this case I have dashed the happiness of others to the ground to build up my own."

He stood with folded arms before her, leaning against the arbor-post.

His face was earnest, and he kept his bright, fascinating eyes upon her and she met their gaze unflinchingly.

He heard her through in silence.

Then he said:

"Luline, I have never loved Kate Randolph, but you I loved the moment our eyes met.

"I admire Miss Randolph immensely and I love Rodney as a brother; but why, when I love you, and I have your own words for it that you love me, should we make ourselves unhappy to give others happiness?

"I would never ask Miss Randolph to marry me.

"Had I not known you I might have done so.

"For you to marry Rodney, loving me, would be sacrilege and sin.

"I ask you to be my wife.

"To remain here and make you my wife would be to bring gloom upon all.

"Let us go far from here.

"If you love me, as you say, you will fly with me, and time will heal the wounds of those we leave behind.

"It may be that we will deal a bitter blow upon all; but how much heavier would it fall for them to see our joy?

"No; my vessel shall sail within several days.

"I will set sail at sunset, and when I have run down the bay a league I will return in my boat for you.

"I will meet you at this very spot.

"Will you be here, Luline?

"Will you become my wife, Luline?"

"Yes."

He smiled, and it was a smile of triumph, for Basil Barton was without mercy for man or woman.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE."

"Did you find Luline at home, Captain Bartona?" asked Kate Randolph, and she was nervous, seemingly, as she made the inquiry.

"Oh, yes; she is keeping house to-day, in the absence of her parents."

"You stayed so short a time I thought she must have been away."

"I wished only to show that she was not forgotten, Miss Kate," and the words of the man soothed the jealous burnings that were rising in the heart of Kate Randolph.

She loved the buccaneer with all the strength of her fiery nature.

Her whole soul went forth with her love, and she was hoping to win the prize she sought.

Had she known him as he was, unlike poor Celeste who lay in her grave, she would have loathed him.

Unlike Lilla, the Cuban girl whom he had deserted, and who sought revenge, she would have risen above the feeling to avenge, and despised the man.

Had she known that Luline loved him, the thought would have driven her to despair.

But she believed him to be noble, all that a true man should be.

She had had a doubting fear that he had felt a feeling akin to affection for Luline, but the thought that her friend, she whom she so dearly loved, could love other than her brother Rodney never entered her mind.

When, therefore, Basil Barton had spoken as he had, she thought that it had been a mere act

of friendship on his part, which his courteous nature could but cause him to do.

She felt happy once more, and her spirits rose accordingly, until he was forced to admit that she was a splendid, fascinating creature, and he muttered to himself:

"If it were not for Luline I should surely love Kate."

And so tender did his manner toward her become that she felt that she had won him all for herself.

But the days went by, and he made no offer of his heart and hand.

Luline had written a note over to say that she had been called away to the side of a sick friend.

Fortunately for her the sickness of her friend gave her this excuse to keep away from Randolph Range, for she felt that she could not look Kate in the face, or the parents of the man who so loved her.

At last the day came when the Sea Venus was to sail.

The crew had painted her and fitted her up; her shot-torn sails had been neatly patched, the water-casks had been filled, and fresh provisions purchased and sent on board.

And Basil Barton bade Kate good-bye without a pang of remorse, although he knew that her heart was breaking for one word of love from him, and that before another sun would set she would be crushed with grief at his flight with Luline.

Away sailed the schooner in the gathering gloom, while poor Kate threw herself down on her knees by the open window, and gazed after the departing vessel, while her heart seemed almost crushed with her bitter, silent grief.

Away sailed the pirate vessel, until the shades of night enveloped it, and then she was stripped of canvas and lay motionless upon the waters of the Chesapeake.

Then a boat was lowered, the oars were muffled, and the two oarsmen pulled slowly back toward the Leslie homestead, while in the stern sat Basil Barton, grim and silent.

A landing was made, and up to the arbor went the outlaw lover.

There Luline awaited him, but she was not alone.

"Basila, this is my old nurse, Mam' Priscilla, whom you remember.

"She will go with me, for I have told her just what I intend to do."

Basil Barton smothered a curse, but he said:

"Certainly, Luline, I am more than glad that you have a protectress, until we can reach a port when you can be made my wife.

"My cabin shall be wholly at the service of yourself and Mam' Priscilla.

"But come, we must catch all of this good breeze that we can."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

She turned as she spoke and gazed back toward her home.

Then her gaze turned upon a glimmering light in the distance.

It shone, she well knew, from the library of the Randolph home.

"I am ready," she said in a low voice.

The two men were called and bore her luggage, which she and Mam' Priscilla had smuggled out of the home, down to the boat, and taking her hand the buccaneer led her to the beach.

"I left a letter for my parents, another for poor Kate," she said, as the boat pulled away.

The negress, who had been the nurse of Luline when an infant, sat forward in the boat, her head bowed, and silent.

At last the schooner was reached, the young girl and Priscilla were ushered into the cabin, the boat was hauled up to the davits, sail was set and away sped the beautiful craft, with "one more unfortunate" upon her decks to wile under the shadow of the black flag that was to make known to her, that she was a buccaneer's bride.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SECRET REVEALED.

THE morning broke rainy and dismal at the home of the fugitive maiden.

The birds had sought shelter in the thickest foliage to escape the driving rain, and the trees bent and twisted under the fierce wind that was blowing.

The waters of the Chesapeake dashed with sullen roar upon the shore and all Nature seemed to chime in with the gloom that must fall upon the hearts of those who dwelt in the two lonely houses into which a snake had come and left the poison of its cruel fangs.

Mr. and Mrs. Leslie had been away for days, visiting a relative, and only the day before had returned.

Luline had been by the bedside of a sick friend, and she too had only come home the morning before.

Her parents had arisen at their accustomed hour and gone to the breakfast-room, ever cheery in spite of the storm without, and filled with the perfume of fresh flowers.

The negro butler had reported to them that

Mam—or "Mammy" Priscilla, for the old negroes of the South were called Mammy—could not be found.

Mam' Priscilla had been Mrs. Leslie's sable playmate in her girlhood, and her protector, for she was a few years older.

She had been the nurse of Luline from the day of her birth, and never having married and had children of her own, her whole life was wrapped up in the beautiful girl, "Missy Lulie," as the slaves called her.

Mrs. Leslie was alarmed at this news, and her husband said:

"Ab, she doubtless fell asleep in Luline's room and slept there."

But Luline had been called, and a second servant going to her door brought the tidings that she was not there, nor was Mam' Priscilla.

"Can Luline have gone over to the Range last night and taken Priscilla with her, after we retired, husband?"

"I guess so, my dear."

A negro boy was at once dispatched to the Randolph plantation to see if Luline was there.

He returned before Mr. and Mrs. Leslie had finished breakfast.

"Missy Luline hadn't been to the plantation for some days."

In alarm now, Mrs. Leslie and her husband sought their daughter's room.

There, upon her bureau, pinned to a silken pin-cushion, were two notes.

One was addressed:

"To FATHER AND MOTHER."

The other read:

"For

"MISS KATE RANDOLPH."

The note to his wife and himself the planter quickly broke open.

It was dated the night before and read:

"FATHER AND MOTHER:—

"I do not mean to do wrong in going away from you, for I cannot help it.

"I am impelled by a power I cannot subdue nor control.

"I thought I loved dear Rodney Randolph, and was happy in the thought that he would claim me some day as his wife.

"Raised in a convent, seeing little of the world, I had met but few men.

"Meeting Captain Bartona, I loved him.

"Still, I tried to be true to Rodney.

"I could not, and so I go with Basila Bartona tonight, and will become his wife.

"Mam' Priscilla goes with me.

"I dare not remain here, for I could not bear the misery of seeing the unhappiness of my noble friend, Kate Randolph, who loves Basila Bartona as I do.

"I could not stand it to see the sorrow of her parents and to feel how noble Rodney would suffer.

"So I fly from my home and shall seek a home elsewhere.

"When I am settled I will write you, and you must come to me.

"More I cannot now say.

"Forgive me and still love me.

"Your unhappy DAUGHTER."

This disjointed letter, evidently written under great excitement, Mr. Leslie read in a low, touching tone to his wife.

She sat with bowed head and trembling form.

They had greatly admired the Peruvian officer, as they believed the pirate to be, and yet they loved Rodney Randolph as a son.

Their sorrow at the flight of their daughter, their only child, was great; but their sympathy for Kate Randolph, for Rodney Randolph and their parents was greater.

"Let us drive over at once, wife, and carry this letter.

"I would rather be hanged than do it; but we must not shrink.

"Poor child! God grant that Bartona make her a good husband.

"As he is to her, so may Heaven be to him."

"Amen!"

The word came sternly from the lips of the mother.

Then the carriage was ordered and the two drove through the rain to Randolph Range.

Kate met them at the door, her face a little sad, for she had felt that Basil would tell her of his love before he went and he had said no word about his coming back.

She saw by the faces of her visitors that something had happened.

Mrs. Leslie led her into the back parlor, and, still holding the letter in her hand, said:

"Kate, my dear child, be brave, for I have bad news for you.

"See, here is a letter from Luline, and she left one for us, also."

She still held no suspicion against her friend, felt no fear of the dishonor of the man who had been their guest.

She took the letter with dread, fearing some evil to Luline, and with deeper sympathy for the mother.

She broke the seal and read:

"MY POOR, DEAR KATE:—

Here the letter fell from her hand.
She uttered no cry. Only a moan escaped from her lips.

But it came from a broken heart, and she sunk back upon the sofa in a swoon.

Aid was called, her parents came to her side and heard all, and then, almost like guilty beings, Mr. and Mrs. Leslie crept away to go back to their desolate home.

Kate returned to consciousness, but was in delirium, and those bending over her feared that she was mad.

Rodney Randolph was at once written for, the plantation boat being dispatched with all haste to mail the letter in Baltimore.

The days dragged by and the young master returned.

His father's letter had told him all, and the change in the handsome, dashing young officer was startling.

He was haggard and white-faced, and he seemed to have had years added to his life.

He uttered no word of reproach, but silently went about the house, often sitting for hours in the arbor on the shore.

At last Kate rallied, and was pronounced out of danger of death.

But her mind was gone—she was a maniac.

To an asylum her brother took her, and then he went back to his duties.

But he was a changed man.

To his brother officers he was ever courtly, to his men kind.

But he was silent, stern and thoughtful, and the joy of youth had forever gone out of his life.

Months glided by and still no news came of the fugitives.

Mr. and Mrs. Leslie, after the going of Kate to the asylum, were wont to visit Randolph Range, and the four, whose joy had gone out of their lives, would sit for hours talking of their children.

Rodney wrote regularly, and his letters always tried to cheer his parents up, but they could see that the iron had entered deep into his soul.

He had visited Mr. and Mrs. Leslie, for he held no feeling against them.

He had told them that the mystery about the man to whom he owed so much, and in whom he had so trusted, was now explained.

"He was a serpent in the guise of a dove, and I could not pierce his mask of treachery, until I felt his fangs," he had said.

He did not blame Luline, he said, for she was under the spell of the serpent.

He knew whom alone to blame, he knew whom to strike.

The man had wrecked the happiness of two homes, he had sent his sister to a madhouse, he had broken his heart, and he only hoped that he would not destroy poor Luline.

So had Rodney Randolph talked to the parents of Luline.

But, immediately upon his arrival at home he had written to a friend in Lima, Peru.

It was an old midshipman friend, one who had fallen in love with a lovely Peruvian girl and married her, resigning from the United States Navy and going to Peru to live.

He had told him the story of Basil Barton, telling him that he was an American, but had Peruvianized his name into Don Basila Bartona.

He asked him to tell him all about him.

Nearly a year passed away, and one day a vessel-of-war dropped anchor in the little harbor of Randolph Range.

Rodney Randolph had applied for sea duty and was her commander, and he was on his first cruise.

He had been to Baltimore and received there his mail, and in that mail was a letter from his friend in Peru.

That letter he read in a hoarse, trembling voice to his parents, and from the lips of his mother came the words:

"Better our child's madness than the wife of that man."

Then, with the letter in hand Rodney Randolph went over to the Leslie plantation.

He knew that he was to deal a fearful blow, but better from his hand, in sympathy, than have the truth come to them in another way.

They saw by his manner that they had to expect evil.

Then in a low, sympathetic tone he read the letter.

It went on to state that Basil Barton had obtained the papers from the Peruvian Government as a privateersman.

But it had afterward transpired that he was Basil the Buccaneer, and at once he had been outlawed by Peru.

Then the letter ended with the words:

"You now know, my dear Randolph that the man of whom you ask is none other than the red-handed pirate, the terror of Southern waters, who is known as Basil, the Buccaneer."

Could news be more terrible to those loving hearts, the parents of Luline, and to him who still loved her, for Rodney Randolph was a man to love but once in a lifetime.

Let us draw the veil of pity over their grief, and change the scene.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE PIRATES' HOME.

To a lonely villa in the island of Cuba Basil Barton had carried his bride, for he had run into San Augustine, after leaving the Chesapeake, and a priest had made Luline his wife, for she was a Catholic.

Then to the island of Cuba he had sailed, and a secluded plantation villa upon the coast, which he well knew of, had been selected as his home.

He had landed by night at a small seaport, sent an agent to purchase the place and put it at once in condition, and then, until ready for his wife, he had cruised about the seas.

He had avoided all tracks of vessels, and no one, not even a seaman, would have suspected the schooner of being the pirate Basil's vessel.

One night he stood in toward the little harbor near his home and landed.

Up to the hill whereon the villa was situated he led his bride, while his men followed with the luggage.

The servants were there, awaiting the coming of their new master, and Luline was ushered into her new home.

It certainly was a grand one, and Mam' Priscilla said:

"Dis beats de ole plantation, Missy Lulie."

After a few days spent at his new home Basil Barton d parted in his vessel, leaving Luline mistress over all.

But he sailed by night, and his movements were all arranged to prevent suspicion against himself, or the presence of his vessel on the coast being known.

Thus the weeks passed by at Buena Vista Villa, as the home of the pirate was called, and the young bride was alone, excepting for Mam' Priscilla.

Her servants were attentive, the overseer attended to all duties, and all went well; but Luline was homesick.

She remembered the past and compared it with the present.

She was in daily anxiety about her husband, fearing that he might be killed at any moment.

She knew that there in Cuba he was not known as a Peruvian, but as an American, for he dared not say that he was the enemy of Spain.

She believed him only what he had told her he was, a captain of a Peruvian cruiser.

She little dreamed that he was at war with the world, that the flag he owed allegiance to was that of the pirate.

With the sorrow which she had left behind her, Luline dared not go home.

She dared not meet Kate Randolph, she dared not face Rodney Randolph, or his parents.

Remorse gnawed at her heart, and yet she tried to feel that she had done no wrong.

Her home was beautiful, and about it were inviting walks.

There were numberless books in her own language, a piano, a harp, for her amusement.

Then there were horses in the stable, for riding or driving, flowers innumerable scented the air with their perfume, the view from the villa was superb, looking off upon the sea and up and down the coast for leagues.

There was everything to make her happy, except the presence of her husband, and that gnawing of conscience.

Mam' Priscilla was like her shadow.

The Cuban negroes had no attraction for the American slave.

"I don't like dem Cuban niggers, Missy Lulie, so I prefers ter pass my time wid you," she was wont to say.

Luline had written home, telling her parents of her elegant home and happiness, and begging them to write her often, and, when the winter months should come, to be sure and make her a visit.

She sketched well, and she sent them many little sketches of her home and its surroundings.

These the overseer took to send for her.

But they never reached their destination, for he was a spy upon the fair young wife, appointed by his master.

Weeks lengthened into months, and yet no letter from Luline's parents.

One night the schooner ran into the little bay, and sought her hiding-place in the lagoon that flowed into it.

Then Luline was happy, and in the few days Basil Barton remained, the home was an Eden to her.

He bought her beautiful gifts, bracelets and necklaces of precious stones, and costly silks, velvets and laces.

She was overwhelmed with his gifts, and his explanation that it took many months to get a letter to her home and back, satisfied her.

Again he departed, and once more she had the blues.

No letter yet came, and when once more Basil, the Buccaneer, ran in by night and visited his home, his beautiful young wife welcomed him with a tiny baby boy, two months old, in her arms.

The man fairly trembled as the little infant smiled in his face, and it seemed that he at once became changed.

A week only he remained at home, and then

he told Luline that he was going to give up the sea, and to expect him back in a few months to remain.

It was six months before he came, and then he sprung from a *volante* which had driven him home from the city.

His vessel he said he had turned over to the Government of Peru, and he meant to devote himself to a life of happiness with his beautiful wife.

Did he keep his promise?

CHAPTER XLIX.

BAD NEWS FOR THE BUCCANEER.

MORE than three years passed away after the flight of Luline Leslie with Basil, the Buccaneer, and yet no word had come to the young wife from her parents.

She had written and written again; but her letters had remained unanswered.

It was a bitter blow to her, but at last she decided to write no more.

"They are angry with me."

"They have discarded me, and I shall humble myself no more."

Such was her decision.

She was happy with her husband, and but for the memory of the past, no cloud would have obscured her life.

The Cuban families near had called upon her, but Basil Barton discouraged intimacy with them, and simply a cold etiquette existed between the Bartonas and their neighbors.

After his return home without his ship, Don Basila, as he was called, seemed happy in his home life.

"I have well followed in the footsteps of Don Andrea De Costa," he said one day to himself, as he sat upon a rustic seat alone, overlooking the sea.

"He led a life of crime, and is happy now with the woman he loved."

"She believes him all that is noble and good."

"I have led a life of infamy and bloodshed, and my wife believes me all that I profess to be."

"De Costa had bitter reasons for driving him to piracy, while I have had no motive other than the devil that is in my nature."

"I have blasted all that I came in contact with."

"But now I have buried the past, and shall live for my beautiful wife, my darling child."

"Am I happy?"

"Well, yes, for I have no conscience, I believe."

"I love Luline now, for our child has shown me what I am."

"I shall live here now for the remainder of my days, and none shall ever know that Don Basila Bartona, the Corsair, was Basil, the Buccaneer."

"The secret must go to my grave with me."

Such was his reasoning, after he had been six months at home.

He had come to really love his wife, and his child was his idol.

As he sat there musing, a vessel came in sight running down the coast.

It was a small *carrera*, and all the sail she could carry was crowded upon her.

She came flying along, watched with interest by the buccaneer, and more so when he saw her run into the harbor, where no vessel came, unless to land at the villa pier.

Instantly he hastened down the steep path leading to the shore.

What could it mean?

With an ever-attendant guilty conscience, he surmised evil, and as the *carrera* touched the pier he met the one who sprung ashore from her.

It was Señor Alfrida, the young Peruvian who had been his second in the duel with the British officers, and the first officer of his schooner.

Señor Alfrida was pale and looked disturbed in mind.

"Well, Alfrida, what story have you to tell?"

In the presence of danger Basil, the Buccaneer, was himself again.

"Señor Captain, a British brig-of-war came to the island rendezvous, piloted in by a traitor, and captured the schooner and all of the men."

"We had, as you suggested, founded a settlement there, and pretended to be an honest island colony, while the schooner we used for a trading-vessel between the adjacent ports."

"But some traitor told that we were the crew of Basil, the Buccaneer, and brought the brig into the harbor."

"The schooner, our little smack and all were seized, and the men all put in irons and the women under guard."

"Then the brig, leaving two-thirds of her men, set sail to Bermuda, where a large English frigate is stationed, to bring her back to rescue all the results of the capture."

"Fortunately I was out with my *carrera*, and no one spoke of it, while one of the Peruvian women, the wife of my boatswain, put out to sea unseen, in a mere shell, and headed us off."

"I at once came to you, for if we can get a good crew somewhere, and run in under English

colors, as though sent by the brig, we can recapture all."

"It can be done, Señor Alfrida, and I will start at once."

"But who was the traitor?"

"I know not, señor, only it was said that he knew where you were in hiding, and would lead the brig officers to the retreat."

"Ha! I must be on my guard."

"But I will at once go with you, and when once more afloat in my good vessel, I can leave my home here and seek another elsewhere."

"Yes, I will go to Spain, where De Costa is, and Basil the Buccaneer spoke more to himself than to his young officer."

Then he hastened up the path to the villa, quickly told Luline that he had to sail at once for Havana, on official business, a vessel having been sent for him, and bade her good-by, promising to return within the month.

"Now, Señor Alfrida, we will head for a port not much out of our way, and where I know we will be able to secure what men we need."

"How many have you on the *carrera*?"

"Nine, with myself, Señor Captain."

"And the force left by the brig?"

"Forty-five, the woman said."

"And how many are there on the island of our people?"

"Sixty-seven men, and about as many women and children."

"We will need forty men, and will get them," was the determined reply.

And away on her mission of peril sailed the swift *carrera*.

CHAPTER L.

ONCE MORE AFLOAT.

BASIL BARTON well knew just where he could pick up a crew of desperate men, ready for any deadly work.

He entered the port by night, and at once sought an agent with whom he had had dealings.

"I need forty men at once, and they must be well armed and ready for any work," was his order to his agent.

"It will cost you money, señor."

"Money I will pay, and if I get my men so that I can sail before dawn, I will pay you double your price."

With this incentive the agent went to work, and within three hours he had collected two-score as ugly set of villains as ever were banded together.

They went at once on board the *carrera*, were hustled into the hold out of sight, and the vessel set sail.

Thirty-six hours more and she ran into the retreat of the pirates.

Upon giving up his vessel, Basil had turned her over to his young officer and made him chief as it were of the island rendezvous, upon which had settled a small number of people.

The crew had married in various ports, and they had brought their wives and children with them, and so quite a little settlement had been formed, the schooner having been stripped of her guns and large spars, and transformed into an honest coaster, in appearance at least.

Feeling assured that they had captured all of the dwellers upon the island, the brig had left nearly all of her crew and gone to report to the flagship of her squadron, and seek aid in carrying off the booty from the island, which was in vast quantities.

Those who remained on the island expected no outside aid for the pirates.

The men were in irons, the women closely guarded by day and locked in the huts by night, and they thus awaited the return of the brig-of-war from the Bermudas.

The man on watch over the harbor contentedly slept, fearing no foe, and so did not see the *carrera* run slowly into port under shortened sail.

Then, too, the channel was a dangerous one, and if the brig should return by night they expected she would wait to come in by daylight, not daring to venture in the darkness.

The *carrera* glided in to an anchorage, the boats were already in tow, and filled with men, and the first that the British tars knew of the presence of a foe, they were upon them, shooting them without mercy, and had become, in a short while, masters of the island.

At once did Basil Barton decide to leave the island as soon as he could do so, for the brig-of-war, accompanied by the flagship, might return at any moment.

The guns of the schooner were hauled out from their hiding-place and gotten on board, the other spars and sails were bent, and by noon of the next day all was ready to sail.

The *carrera* and smacks were loaded with booty, and the people of the island, while, with his old crew on his deck and a few of his new men to make the number full, Basil Barton set sail.

He was once more afloat, and he gave orders to the *carrera* and its attendant fleet of small boats where to head to find another retreat, and among people as lawless as themselves, and where they would be welcome, he well knew.

The crew of the brig-of-war, dead, wounded and unharmed, were left upon the island, the

officer in charge being told to inform his captain, with the compliments of Basil, the Buccaneer, that if he wished to find his vessel to look for her upon the high seas.

Hardly had the schooner dropped the little fleet, when a sail was sighted.

Then another came into view.

They at once were reported to be a sloop-of-war and a brig, and wishing to give his people a good chance to get a long start, Basil, the Buccaneer, headed toward the strange vessels.

They were the brig and the sloop, returning to get the prize of the former, and they at once gave chase to the daring man who so boldly hung down the gauntlet of defiance, right in their teeth as it were.

The schooner had not lost any of her speed, and kept well ahead of the pursuers, spreading all sail as though doing her best to escape, yet with drags out astern to check her speed and allow them to slowly gain.

At last when night was near at hand, and he felt that the little fleet would be safe, Basil Barton gave orders to haul the drags on board, and the schooner fairly sailed away from her pursuers, as though they were at anchor, greatly to their amazement.

"Now to my home, Señor Alfrida," said the buccaneer, and the schooner was put away for the coast of Cuba.

Just one month after his departure, he ran into the lagoon, his old hiding-place.

It was night, yet not late, and as he reached the hill-top and crossed the lawn, he was surprised to see no light glimmering in the mansion.

A dread seemed to fall upon his heart.

Why that gloom?

In the servants' quarter of the villa, a light shone, and thither he went, when his knock failed to receive any response.

"My wife! my child!" he gasped, as a servant met him.

The negro answered in Spanish:

"The señora and the young señor have gone, Señor Master."

"Gone! and where?"

"The señora left a letter for my master."

Into the villa he went, lights flashed through the house, and the servant led him to his own desk, upon which lay a sealed envelope with the address:

"For *SEÑOR BASILA BARTONA*."

It was in the handwriting of his wife.

"Begone!" he said, sternly, wishing to be alone.

The servant departed in haste, for the face of his master frightened him.

Then Basil Barton broke the seal and there was an inner envelope.

This was addressed:

"To *CAPTAIN BASIL*,
The Buccaneer."

He groaned in agony of spirit, and his hands, which could unflinchingly take a human life, trembled violently in opening the letter.

His face was as black as a tornado, and his complexion had assumed a hue like death.

With an effort at self-control he read the words which his wife had written him.

They were not many, but they were sufficient.

The writing showed that the hand had trembled that held the quill which traced the lines, and yet what was said was to the point.

"I have learned all," said the letter "as you may know from the inner address upon this letter."

"I am a pirate's wife, my child is a pirate's son."

"Heaven grant that at least we have the honest claim of wife and son."

"Were it otherwise, I would seek to kill you—did I fail, I would rear my boy to seek your life."

"I go from you to-night, for I know there is no doubt."

"You, a man wearing the mask of a gentleman, a chevalier in your conduct openly, are the black-hearted, red-handed terror of the ocean, Basil, the Buccaneer."

"Can my punishment for marrying you be worse than knowing this?"

"I go from you, as I said, this night, forever."

"I take with me my child and Mam' Priscilla."

"These are all."

"Every article of value you have given me you will find in my bureau-drawer and the key is in your desk."

"Every dollar you gave me is also there."

"I would not touch now one of those blood stained trinkets or a piece of gold to save even my child from starving."

"It is a pirate's booty."

"I brought with me, you may remember, a thousand dollars of my own money and some valuable jewelry given me by my parents and friends."

"This will support us until I can get work, for I dare not go back to my desolate home, my unhappy parents."

"Farewell, and may Heaven's curse rest upon you, Basil Barton."

"*LULINE BARTON*,
The Buccaneer's Bride."

Twice the man read over this letter, full of anguish, bitterness and contempt for himself.

Then he arose and sought to find out what the servants could tell him.

They knew nothing.

Did the señora had any visitors, they were asked.

They had no visitors to the villa.

When had she departed?

Ten days before.

How did she go?

In the *volante* to the town.

The coachman was sent for, and he only knew that he had left the señora at the hotel in the town, and had been told to return home.

What baggage had she taken?

This he discovered for himself.

She had only taken what she had brought with her.

All of his costly gifts, her velvet, silks and laces she had left behind, and the ring he had given her as his bride he found with the other jewels.

The overseer was sent for, but the señora had not let him into the secret.

He knew not that she was going until she had gone.

"I will find her."

So said Basil Barton, and he at once started for the town to track her.

There he learned that she had taken a vessel for New Orleans.

"I will go there, for I will find her."

So he said, and two nights after the schooner was sailing away from Cuba.

The villa had been closed, and orders given to the agent to sell it and the slaves also.

Hardly had the schooner disappeared beyond the horizon, when a brig-of-war, flying the Cross of St. George, hove in sight.

It was the British brig on the track of the buccaneer, for the traitor who had betrayed his island retreat, was leading his foes to the home of the pirate in Cuba.

CHAPTER LI.

THE FLIGHT.

It was a habit of Luline, to always go out upon the hill-top each afternoon, toward sunset, and watch the coming of twilight.

The view was a grand one, a soft, balmy breeze would steal in from the sea, to fan her cheeks, and there was a feeling of rest in her heart.

One afternoon, as was her wont, she went there, and she saw a small *goleta* sailing into the bay.

It was a tiny craft and contained but two occupants.

One of them she saw with her glass, which she always carried with her, was an old man, for his hair and beard were white.

The other was a youth of twenty.

Both were dressed in the garb of coast sailors, and came slowly up the steep path, the old man seeming to walk with difficulty.

The little baby boy was asleep, Priscilla was watching him, the servants were about their work, and Luline was alone upon the hill.

She awaited the approach of the strangers, or the gray hairs of the old man gave her confidence.

They saw her as they reached the hill-top, halted, said a few words together and then came toward her.

Both of them took off their caps as they approached and the youth said:

"We have come to see the Señora Bartona."

"I am she, so tell me how I can serve you."

"Do you bring me news of my husband?" and her face grew anxious.

"We come not from the señora's husband; but it is of him that we have come to speak."

"What! has harm befallen him?"

"Señora, my father will speak," said the youth.

Luline was terribly anxious, and they saw it, so the old man said, hastily:

"No harm has befallen your husband, señora; but I would tell you that it is you that harm has come upon, for the man you love is unworthy of you."

The wife at once grew indignant, and hot words fell from her lips.

But the old man listened in silence, and then said:

"Señora, I am a poor man, and this boy is all that is left to me."

"I come to tell you the truth, and I beg you to hear my story."

"If you deem it false, then send me from you."

The old man's manner impressed Luline.

She was angry at a word against her husband, but she was unable to tear herself away.

Something, she knew not what, forced her to remain.

"I will hear what you have to say," she said, coldly.

She sunk back upon the rustic seat as she spoke, and the two stood facing her, the old man leaning upon his cane.

"I am a Cuban, señora, as you doubtless know from my language."

"At sight of him poor Lilla's head and heart was turned, and, forgetting her lover, her father's white hairs, she fled with the handsome stranger.

"Months after she returned to us, a broken-hearted girl, and wearing no band of gold upon her finger to show that she was wedded.

"Her lover still kept true to her, forgave her, and asked her to become his wife.

"But no, she went away from home again, and her motive was revenge.

"She sought the man who had destroyed her life's happiness.

"What had become of her we knew not for a long time.

"But one day, some years ago, my son, as I call he who was to have been the husband of my child, met an old shipmate of his boyhood.

"He had gone to the bad, but loving his boy, he had given up his evil life, for he had turned a pirate, and returned home.

"This man told my son a sad story.

"He said that poor Lilla had shipped upon the vessel of your husband, as a sailor, and her sex was not known.

"In Spain she had sought to betray the vessel for what she really was, and gain her revenge by having the false man hanged.

"But her plot was discovered, just as it was on the verge of success, and she and the two men who were aiding her, were strung up to the yard-arm.

"She appealed for mercy for the two men, and asked none for herself.

"But no mercy was shown.

"She told who she was, that she was a woman.

"But the destroyer refused to believe her, and she was hanged, and then cast into the sea.

"My son told me the pirate's story, and brought him to my house.

"Then he repeated all, and my son and all of us vowed vengeance.

"The brave boy set forth to track the monster down, guided by the directions of the one-legged pirate, and he found the rendezvous of the man he sought, an island two days' sail from here.

"But the man he sought had turned his schooner into a coaster, given up his career, and sought a home elsewhere, for he married a wife, it was said.

"My son found his home, told me, and my boy here, and then he went on board a British brig to destroy the island retreat.

"He has now gone there, and we, learning that the man had sailed from here, came to you, to tell you, señora, how cruelly you were deceived.

"We came to tell you that the man who is your husband is not a Peruvian officer, as he professes to be, but none other than Basil, the Buccaneer, whose name is a curse upon the waters.

"Do you hear, señora?"

Hear!

She had heard every word and it seemed to run into her heart like red-hot steel.

She had wondered at many things and could not understand them.

Yet she had never held suspicion against her husband.

She had found the kit of poor Lilla upon the schooner.

There were letters in it, and papers, but she understood Spanish but imperfectly then, so could not understand all that they told, though it was the diary of the poor girl.

She had wondered that the things were on board the schooner, and that rare jewels were among them, the gifts of the buccaneer, and she had spoken to her husband about them.

He had seemed annoyed at her finding them, and had told Priscilla to take all except the jewels and throw them into the sea.

Then he had told her that they had belonged to a sweetheart of one of his officers, who had, in male attire, come on board the schooner.

Now, as plain as daylight, the truth was revealed to her.

Something told her not to doubt.

She looked like one who had been struck a stunning blow in the head.

She rose, staggered, but recovering herself, walked away.

She did not notice the old Cuban or his son.

It seemed to her that she had dreamed what she heard.

Straight to her husband's room she went, and she knew that he had left his keys, something he never had done before.

She opened his desk and what she saw confirmed her fears.

She opened his treasure-box.

Within was the booty which could only belong to a pirate, one who had robbed thousands.

There were papers, maps, letters from secret agents, all damning proof of guilt in the man she had become the wife of.

She needed nothing more, and she determined to act.

Strangely calm, but white and cold as marble, she sought Priscilla.

She sent her to bid the old man and his son to come to her.

She wished the negress to hear the bitter story from the old man's lips.

But Priscilla came back and said that they were gone, and a small *goleta* with two men in it was running out of the harbor.

"We must go from here, Priscilla," Luline had said.

Then she packed up that which was her own, and writing the letter which the reader has read, left it for her husband upon his return.

Away from the hateful place, as now it was to her, they were driven, Luline, Mam' Priscilla and the little baby boy, for he was not yet two years old.

Reaching the town, they put up at a hotel for the night, and the next day took passage upon a vessel bound to New Orleans.

Where she was going Luline knew not.

She only sought to leave Cuba, and to cover up her tracks so that Basil the Buccaneer could never find her, for she dreaded that he might seek to steal from her their child.

The vessel sailed away, and those on board wondered at the beautiful, white-faced woman, whose eyes showed wells brimful of deepest sorrow.

She had not shed a tear, and the fountain of tears seemed dried up.

"He shall never find us, Priscilla—never! for he would kill me and take my child," she said, in a low tone, as the land of Cuba faded from view.

"No, missy, he must never find us," answered Priscilla, and she hugged the baby boy, a pirate's son, closer to her heart.

CHAPTER LII.

WRECKED.

UPON arriving in New Orleans, Luline, the buccaneer's wife, sought to find a hiding-place.

She knew not where to go, what to do.

But in walking about the city, with Priscilla carrying her child, she came upon a little vine-covered cottage that looked very inviting.

It was in the outskirts of the city, was a snug little home, with flower and vegetable-garden, and a most cosey retreat in fact.

Upon the gate was a sign which read:

"FOR RENT."

Into it she went, and a kindly-faced matron met her.

Yes, the place was to rent, as she lived there

if alone and a married daughter in the North, whose health was poor, wished her to come on and live with her.

"If I could get the right parties," the woman added, "I would let my cow, chickens and old horse and chaise all go with the place."

The price was asked, and it was most reasonable.

"I will take it," said Luline.

"For three years I wish to let it, ma'm."

"I will take it for that time."

"And your references, ma'm?"

"My gold, in advance."

The money was paid, and two days after Luline said, sadly:

"Mam' Priscilla, we have a home."

"Yes, missy."

"And enough over to support us for half a year. Then, if I get no work, I have jewels that will last as long as we have this place for, as they will bring a good price."

And in that little home the buccaneer's wife and good old Priscilla passed the months away, both wrapped up in the little boy that was growing so fast and so handsome.

Needlework, a few sketches now and then, and music less ns to a neighbor's child brought in some money; but it was not enough to support them when the last of Luline's gold was gone.

Then they fell back upon her jewels.

First a ring, then a brooch, next a bracelet and a necklace followed, and the price they brought kept them from want.

They went out seldom, for they were in constant dread of being found by the buccaneer, and the little boy was never allowed out of their sight, for the papers were full of the daring deeds of the famous sea outlaw, Basil, the Buccaneer.

Luline had taken her own name once more, and the few neighbors near her knew her as Mrs. Leslie.

The name of her boy she had changed from Basil to Randolph Leslie, after the man whose love she had refused to become the wife of a pirate.

At last the three years passed away and the owner came to claim it, or get her rent for three more years.

Poor Luline had not enough left of her jewels to raise fifty dollars.

Her health was wretched, and she felt that she could not last long, so she said:

"Mam' Priscilla, we will go home."

Priscilla jumped with joy.

"Home, missy? To de ole plantashun home?"

"Yes, for I will not live very long, Mam' Priscilla, and my parents will not turn their backs upon their dying child."

"They will not refuse to care for my boy."

"No, missy, it bain't in 'em to do so."

"Well, pack up, Mam' Priscilla, and we will leave on the next packet-ship that sails for Baltimore, for I have money enough to take us home, I think."

But she had not, when all was paid up, and so they took passage on a schooner bound to Baltimore.

The accommodations were not the best, but they were going home, and Luline seemed almost happy, and Mam' Priscilla said to her one day:

"Lor', missy, you build right up when you git back to de ole plantashun."

That night a storm arose and so violent was it that the schooner labored fearfully and sprung a leak.

At last they had to take to the boats, and one was to bear the poor invalid, her little boy and Priscilla.

They were placed in it and the skipper and the two men who were to go with them in that boat went back for more things to make them as comfortable as possible.

Then came a mighty wave and snapped the line, the boat was adrift, and in the darkness it was not seen again by the captain and his crew.

But the waves did not sink it, and it went drifting on its way, while the food gave out, all but what the faithful negress saved for the little boy, and one night, as peacefully as though falling asleep, Luline, the buccaneer's wife, passed across the River of Death.

Two days after the boat was sighted, as told in the first chapters of this story, and a strange destiny guided it across the path of Basil, the Buccaneer

CHAPTER LIII.

THE NEMESIS.

WHEN Rodney Randolph knew just who was the man who had so deceived him, he made up his mind that he would be avenged upon him.

True, Basil Barton had saved his life, but the debt was canceled.

Possessing ample means he ordered a schooner built, and upon the same model of the vessel of the buccaneer, for he went to builders of that craft and told them just what he wanted.

The schooner was armed thoroughly, when finished, and Government put her in commission, making Rodney Randolph her commander with the rank of captain.

The schooner, Rodney Randolph had named The Nemesis, and in her he meant to hunt down Basil, the Buccaneer.

He had much to avenge, for his sister was still the inmate of an asylum, Luline had been made the wife, if wife she was, of a buccaneer, and he had been robbed of the woman he loved.

About the seas cruised the Nemesis, her stern, sad-faced commander attending to all duties devolving upon him, yet ever with the determination to find Basil, the Buccaneer.

And from sea to sea went the desperate pirate, robbing, killing, and escaping all vessels that attempted his capture.

He had, with Luline fled from him, determined to find her, and yet again sail the seas as a pirate.

From port to port he had gone in disguise, looking everywhere for his wife and child.

But so securely had Luline hidden away that he had failed to find her.

Secreting his vessel in a secluded arm of the Chesapeake, he had gone in disguise, as a common sailor, to the vicinity of her old home.

By careful inquiry he learned that she had never returned home, her parents had left their plantation deserted and gone to the city to live, and both Colonel Randolph and his wife had passed away and their son had sold the place to others, never caring to dwell there again, where only the most painful memories haunted him.

"And the young captain?" he had asked, of the one who had told him the story, glad to make known to a stranger the sad romance of the Randolph and Leslie families.

"Bless your soul, he's cruising in his schooner, the Nemesis, and he bain't got but one motive in doing so."

"What is that?"

"Why, to hunt down that red handed pirate, Basil, the Buccaneer."

"You think he will find him?"

"Well, I dunno; but he's mighty determined, and Cap'n Randolph is a dangerous man who sets his head against an enemy."

"Why, he was a young man; bright as a lark, only half a dozen years back, and now he seems like a man who had lived his fifty years, and all of 'em full of sorrow."

Such was the information that Basil Barton obtained, while visiting the scenes of his guilty deeds in the past.

Not a word could he hear of Luline, and he was convinced that she had never returned to her home, for, as he had had all of her letters intercepted which she had written to her parents, he judged that she feared to go back to them, thinking they would not receive her.

Pirate though he was, he still loved her, and he loved his child more, and he longed to find them, intending if he did so, to give up piracy forever, and urge Luline to go to another land

The Last of the Pirates.

and live with him where no one could ever track them.

It was after returning to his vessel, and again putting to sea, following his visit to Luline's home, that Basil, the Buccaneer sighted the drifting boat, which contained the dead bodies of his wife and Priscilla, and his little boy still alive.

What followed that discovery the reader already knows, for he beheld the bodies buried at night in the sea, while, at the command of their chief, the pirate crew stood with uncovered heads.

He has seen the little boy lie at the point of death with a raging fever, and how, in his desire to save the life of his child, Basil Barton dared go back to the scenes of his boyhood, and, in disguise, call upon his brother, that brother whose life he had blasted, and beseech him to save his little son.

The reader has seen the result of Doctor Loyd Barton's visit to the schooner of his buccaneer brother, and his return, and how the outlaw craft set sail once more.

Filled with his good resolves, Basil Barton meant to give up piracy forever and seek a home in another land for his boy and himself.

But danger dogged his wake, and he found that his worst foe was upon his track, for the Nemesis was his pursuer.

Anxious to escape, he did all in his power to do, except to fire upon his pursuer; but this he would not do, for he had hauled down the black flag with the coming of his son on board his vessel.

He might have beaten off the Nemesis, he felt, but he would not do so.

His vessel was old, shattered by many a severe engagement, and though still a fleet sailer, could not glide over the seas as once she could.

If he had to lose her, with the devilishness of his nature, he meant to sacrifice others, too.

He believed that he could escape with his child.

If not, they could perish together.

With this resolve, as has been seen, and with the wretched officer, Marco Madrid, in chains in the cabin, the schooner was driven on shore, and the shock brought down her masts and rigging, killing several of her crew, while boarding waves swept the remainder into the sea.

Half an hour after the wrecked schooner was boarded by the boats from the Nemesis.

But, though Marco Madrid, the mutineer pirate, was found in the cabin and claimed to be a prisoner of the buccaneer chief, he whom Rodney Randolph sought was not there.

Had he escaped to the shore or been swept to his death in the sea?

CHAPTER LIV.

RETRIBUTION.

BELIEVING the story of Marco Madrid, the pirate lieutenant, that he had been a captive of Basil, the Buccaneer, and his having found him there in the cabin of the wreck in chains lending truth to the statement, Captain Rodney Randolph determined to go with him, as he had asked, to the home of the outlaw chief on the coast of Cuba.

He felt, as Marco Madrid said, that if he escaped with his life in the wreck he would, having no vessel or crew, go to his home, where no one knew him as a pirate.

Marco Madrid did not know, however, that the buccaneer had given up his home in Cuba after the flight of Luline.

He supposed that he still held it, and the finding of Luline, her boy and the negress he could not comprehend, as he still supposed they were in Cuba.

He made known to Rodney Randolph the finding of the boat at sea and whom it contained, adding:

"I guess the señora had been out in the boat with the negress and child, and been driven to sea by a storm."

"His wife, you said?" asked Rodney Randolph, as the two sat in the cabin of the wreck, awaiting for the day to break.

"Yes, señor."

"Her name?"

"He called her the Señora Luline."

Captain Randolph groaned; but he shut his teeth hard together for a moment, and then asked:

"And a negress, you say, was in the boat?"

"Yes, Señor Captain."

"Do you remember her name?"

"They called her Priscilla, señor."

"And the boy, how old was he?"

"About five, perhaps younger," answered the pirate, careful not to compromise himself, for he had been a coxswain on the schooner when Basil Barton had taken Luline from her home.

He knew that she had become his wife, and he was aware that the buccaneer had established her in a home on the coast of Cuba.

Then Marco Madrid had been one of the prisoners captured upon the island retreat, and resided with Basil.

He did not know of the flight of Luline from her home, for the buccaneer kept it a secret from his crew, and he supposed his wife was still living at the villa, until the drifting boat had been picked up at sea with her dead body in it.

So he felt sure that the buccaneer would return to his home, not believing that he had escaped to betray him, should he himself gain the shore.

He was therefore most careful not to seem to know too much when Rodney Randolph questioned him.

"Did you hear the name of the little boy?" and Rodney Randolph tried hard to be calm.

"Well, señor, I was watching the little fellow, while his father was on deck, and he said in his delirium:

"Mam'silla, Randolph awful hungry, so I suppose his name was Randolph, and, by the way, señor, that is your name."

The pirate fairly started, as he caught sight of the face of the American captain.

It was writhing, as though the man was in mortal agony.

Then, without a word more he left the cabin and went on deck.

"Yes, poor Luline it was in that boat, and old Priscilla. And they were buried in the sea."

"Poor Luline! she now lies at the bottom of the sea."

"And her boy?"

"He was ill, the Cuban said."

"And his name is Randolph."

"Ah me! I thought my emotion would smother me when I heard my name, given to her boy."

"If he lives, and I can find him, I will care for him for Luline's sake."

"But his father must hang!"

Then the sorrowing man returned to the cabin, and, leaving him there, Madrid went on deck.

As he got there, lost in thought, his eyes fell upon an object that glittered upon the floor.

He stepped forward and picked it up.

"My God! it is my own miniature!"

"One I gave Luline when last I left home."

It was of heavy gold, and in the shape of a book, and a chain was attached to it, the clasp of which was broken.

"I placed in this hidden cavity a note I hoped she would find—ha! she never found it," and he opened the locket as he spoke, by touching a spring.

"Yes, this is not what I wrote, for it is her writing."

He took the piece of paper, which had been closely folded, so as to fit in the space, and read it with face flushing and paling by turns.

Closely written, it was the story of her unhappy life up to her setting sail for home.

It was addressed to him, and it stated that the locket was placed about her little boy's neck, and in case of her death was to be returned to him, and in it she beseeched Rodney Randolph to look after her child.

The tears stood in the stern eyes of the strong man as he read this message from the dead.

"It has dropped from the boy's neck and escaped observation."

"Luline, I will do as you ask me; for all the pain you have given me, I forgive you."

He placed the locket carefully away and went on deck, and as the day had dawned, he saw the situation of the wreck.

It would not last long where it lay, in a storm from the sea, and glancing shoreward he saw a score of bodies strewing the beach.

Going ashore in his boat, he found a man crouching under the shelter of a bank, and holding in his arms a small child.

Instantly Rodney Randolph was by his side.

But the man was not, as he expected, Basil the Buccaneer, but a seaman of the pirate schooner, who said that the boy had dashed against him in the sea, and grasping him, he had brought him ashore.

The buccaneer he had not seen, but, as the little boy was alone, he supposed he had been drowned, for otherwise he would never have deserted his child.

The man's leg was broken, and yet, thus crippled, he had saved himself and the little boy.

Rodney Randolph took the boy in his arms, and the little fellow, wan from his severe illness, looked up into his face and said softly:

"Take me to mamma."

"I will take you to my home, my little boy, for you are guiltless," and though Rodney Randolph spoke in a firm voice, he was all in a tremor, for in his arms he held the child of she who had been Luline Leslie.

Then turning to the pirate, he said:

"My man, for saving this child's life, I will give you your freedom, as soon as you are able to leave my vessel."

"Men, carry him on board the schooner, and have the surgeon take the best care of him."

The order was obeyed, and giving the little boy to a seaman to also carry on board the schooner, and place in the surgeon's care, Rodney Randolph began his search among the dead for the outlaw chief.

But though many of the pirates were found, not one was Basil, the Buccaneer.

When the booty had been taken from the wreck, and placed on board the vessel-of-war, the latter headed for the coast of Cuba, and under the guidance of Marco Madrid, the home of Basil, the Buccaneer, was visited.

But there it was learned that he had not been there for years, and the pirate officer having been betrayed by the wounded man who had saved the life of the little boy, Marco Madrid was quickly swung up to the yard-arm, thus justly expiating his crimes.

Having driven Basil, the Buccaneer to his destruction, for Rodney Randolph felt sure that he had been lost, he returned to Baltimore and placed his little namesake in the hands of his grandparents, who would bring him up in ignorance of his mother's sad fate and his father's infamy.

CHAPTER LV.

DRIVEN TO DOOM.

WHEN Basil, the Buccaneer, stood awaiting the shock, of his vessel driving upon the shore, he held tightly clasped in his arms, his little boy.

The shock came, the waters dashed over the wreck, sweeping the deck, and the buccaneer was hurled against the wreckage with such a force that momentarily stunned him, and he relinquished his hold upon the child.

In an instant he regained his strength and consciousness, but the boy was gone.

He shouted for him, swam around in the wild waters, looking for him in the darkness, and then, in despair was driven ashore.

Others sunk in the waves about him, but he, weighted down though he was with gold and jewels, reached the shore.

Believing his child dead, fearing that the boats would land and pursue him, he ran with all speed away from the scene, for he meant not to die upon the gallows or yard-arm if in his power to save himself.

Several days after, worn-out, half-starved and wretched, he reached a small hamlet, and there he chartered a small fishing-smack to take him to the nearest seaport.

With no vessel, his crew gone, and, as he believed, his child dead, he decided to no longer be a wanderer, but to seek a home in which to pass the remainder of his days.

He had vast wealth about him, and lived on by a power he could not resist, he at last found himself near the home of Luline.

He had allowed his hair and beard to grow, and thus disguised he feared not recognition from those who had barely seen him in the past, for he knew that Rodney Randolph had moved away, as had also the parents of Luline.

The Leslie plantation was for sale, and he bought it all furnished as it was.

He purchased a few slaves, and there, with his sins upon him, settled down to live the life of an exile.

Several years passed away, and in the new owner of the plantation no one suspected the person of Basil, the Buccaneer.

One day he was strolling along the shore when he saw a vessel heading inshore, and watching it he saw it drop anchor in the little harbor of Randolph Range.

He hastened back to his house and sent a faithful servant to inquire what the mission of the craft was in those quiet waters.

Just at sunset the man returned and made his report to the effect that Captain Rodney Randolph had bought back his old home, and, as his sister, Miss Kate, had regained her mind, they had come there to live the rest of their days, and the vessel had brought their furniture and servants.

"Daniel, is my little sloop ready to sail?" he asked, of the negro, for Basil, the Buccaneer, always kept a little vessel at anchor off the shore of his home, with provisions on board and all ready to depart at a moment's notice, and yet, since his coming, the craft had never left her anchorage.

"Yes, massa, we keeps her always ready," answered Daniel.

"Well, get all the people on board, with fresh water and provisions, for I shall start on a cruise to-night."

Daniel obeyed, and two hours after, a sloop of thirty tons stood away from the shore, and the pirate's home, all furnished as it was, was left to solitude and decay, for from that night the little craft was never heard of again, and the fate of Basil, the Buccaneer, was enshrouded in a mystery never to be solved.

THE END.

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